

Post-deconstructive Subjectivity and History

SHOUT
SHARE **IT**



Post-deconstructive Subjectivity and History

Phenomenology, Critical Theory, and
Postcolonial Thought

By

Aniruddha Chowdhury



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON

2014

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chowdhury, Aniruddha.

Post-deconstructive subjectivity and history: phenomenology, critical theory, and postcolonial thought / by Aniruddha Chowdhury.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-25989-8 (hardback : alk. paper) -- ISBN 978-90-04-26004-7 (e-book)

1. Deconstruction. 2. Phenomenology. 3. Postcolonialism. 4. Critical theory. I. Title.

B809.6.C435 2013

149'.97--dc23

2013027249

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual "Brill" typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see www.brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISBN 978-90-04-25989-8 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-26004-7 (e-book)

Copyright 2014 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Global Oriental, Hotei Publishing, IDC Publishers and Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA.

Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

In Memory of my grandmother:
Bani Mukherjee

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ix
Introduction.....	1

PART ONE

PHENOMENOLOGY/POST-PHENOMENOLOGY, TIME AND SUBJECT

I. Of the Line: Temporality, Ethical Repetition, and Subject in <i>Being and Time</i>	17
II. Beyond Being: Event, Time and Subject in Levinas	49

PART TWO

CRITICAL THEORY OF HISTORY

III. Memory, Modernity, Repetition: Walter Benjamin's Ethico-Political History	87
---	----

PART THREE

POSTCOLONIAL SINGULAR-UNIVERSAL: ETHICAL SUBJECT AND HISTORY

IV. Postcolonial Irony: Time, Subject, and History in the Critical Writings of Wilson Harris.....	121
V. Fecundity of the Ethical: Deconstruction, History and the Subaltern in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.....	143
Bibliography	171
Index of Names	175

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Terry Goldie, Ian Balfour, and Asher Horowitz of York University read and commented on each chapter of the manuscript. I am deeply indebted to each of them for their intellectual generosity and guidance.

I am grateful to Brian Singer, and Robert Albritton for the kind encouragement in the early years of my Graduate Studies.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my friend Michael Marder. I have benefited immensely from the inspiring conversation I had with him in Toronto.

Aubie Golombek's friendship is an invaluable gift, his singular presence an impetus to thinking.

I take this opportunity to thank friends, conversation with whom was instructive and beautiful: Paul Brienza, Donald Burke, Colin Campbell, Erica Cross, Sarah Dingle, Anne-Marie Grant, Alex Levant, Solange Luis, George Rodrigues, Jason Rovito, and Shawn Thomson.

I owe special thanks to Jennifer Pavelko, Julia Berick, and Liesbeth Hugenholtz of Brill for taking an interest in the manuscript.

I am deeply grateful to my friends Niladri Mukherjee, and Arnab Chatterjee, in Calcutta, for the intellectual care and companionship.

My deepest thanks go to my parents Nikhilesh and Chandralekha Chowdhury for their love and affection and for their support during the writing process.

My grandmother Bani Mukherjee, who passed away in 2001, would have been the happiest person to see this manuscript published. I dedicate the manuscript to her memory.

INTRODUCTION

I

Deconstruction, best-known through the works of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, has offered the most rigorous critique of the metaphysics of the subject. According to both Heidegger and Derrida, the tradition of metaphysics has always been the metaphysics of the subject, as the concept of *subjectum*, whether conceived as the Greek *hupokeimenon*, or as the *cogito*, or as the “I think” of transcendental apperception, or as “spirit,” has always been determined as the condition of possibility of the meaning of beings. In the modern tradition, it is in Man, the human subject, that the foundation is located. It would not be wrong to say that in displacing Man from his status of being the ground, in decentring the subject as the ground, deconstruction is not only in the company of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud but also converges with the human sciences’ famous proclamation of the death of Man. Texts such as ‘Letter on “Humanism”’ (Heidegger) and ‘Ends of Man’ (Derrida) are the canons of philosophical anti-humanism.¹ Deconstruction is distinct from nihilism in that it seeks to think the question of the ground more *radically* than what the modern tradition does through the subject (Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl). The concepts such as ontological difference and differance cannot be thought under the category of the subject if the latter is conceived as the substantiality of self-presence, or, more broadly, the identity of the selfsame.

Yet, the aim of the present work is to argue that deconstruction is not only not a dissolution of the subject, as it is often opined, but a thinking of the subject, or better, subjectivity otherwise than the transcendental philosophy or even ontology. Within the tradition of deconstruction there are two apparently conflicting ways of thinking on the subject. On the one hand, there is the attempt to radically historicize, in the sense of genealogical unraveling, the subject. If deconstruction, in Heidegger and Derrida, puts in question transcendental subjectivity (Kant, Hegel, Husserl) it does so in order to think the historicity of the subject without referring to

¹ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on “Humanism,”” in *Pathmarks*, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Jacques Derrida, “The Ends of Man” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

history as the synthetic activity of the subject, or without turning history itself into a transcendental ground. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger thinks history according to his conception of ec-static temporality and as a communal dimension of the authenticity of Dasein. Derrida, however, has shown perspicuously that Heidegger's own conception of "vulgar time" and of history as gathering still smack of a subtle resumption of the metaphysics of presence. For Derrida, history is metaphysical when it is founded upon a privilege of presence. The concept of history "has always been in complicity with teleological and eschatological metaphysics, in other words, paradoxically, in complicity with that philosophy of presence to which it was believed history could be opposed."² But, by the same token, in Derrida's thinking, the deconstructive double gesture consists *not* in opposing the text to history, as it is often believed, but in overturning and displacing the metaphysical, that is, the essential question of historicity (the condition of the possibility of history) into the time of the entirely other. As Derrida writes, "If the word 'history' did not of itself convey the motif of a final repression of differences, one could say that only differences can be 'historical' from the outset and in each of their aspects."³ But Derrida would maintain, in a post-structuralist manner, that the dimension of historicity as differences does not include the subject conceived in the sense of self-identity. It is in Emmanuel Levinas's work, on the other hand, that we find, perhaps for the first time, a theorization that defends what I may, borrowing from Derrida, call a post-deconstructive subjectivity, a subjectivity that is otherwise than ontology, a subjectivity that is non-self-identical.⁴ The subjectivity that Levinas defends, however, belongs to an eschatology which he opposes to history. History, for Levinas, betrays subjectivity. There are thus two conflicting positions: on the one hand, a historicity that is without the subject, and, on the other,

² Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 291.

³ Derrida, *Margins*, 11.

⁴ It is against the dominant reception of deconstruction as the dissolution of the question of the subject that Derrida, in a conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy, exhorts us to think of the post-deconstructive subjectivity. Here is Derrida's remark:

I am thinking of those today who would try to reconstruct a discourse around a subject that would not be pre-deconstructive, around a subject that would no longer include the figure of mastery of self, of adequation to self, center and origin of the world, etc.... but which would define the subject rather as the finite experience of non-identity to self, as the underivable interpellation inasmuch as it comes from the other, from the trace of the other, with all the paradoxes or the aporia of being-before-the-law, and so on. Jacques Derrida, *Points... interviews, 1974–1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 266.

a post-deconstructive subjectivity that history betrays. This conflict, within the tradition of deconstruction, offers the philosophical problematic, so to speak, of the present study. Our problematic and the task would be: to think subjectivity and its temporal structure beyond ontology; *and* to think history, historiography and historical subject – history that requires what I would call the host subject of history – in a way which is deconstructive. Part of the project is to extend deconstruction into the realm of the critical theory of history that appears in the work of Walter Benjamin. I attempt to think deconstructive history and historical subject principally through a reading of Benjamin.

In parenthesis: in the conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy, to which we have already referred, Derrida mentions the problematic of the liquidation of the subject in the recent French theory as an unfounded *doxa*. The latter amounts to a slogan: a return to the subject, a return of the subject. It is an unfounded opinion because, as Derrida says, neither Lacan, nor Althusser nor Foucault “liquidates” the subject. Rather, for these thinkers and for some of the thinkers they draw on (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche), the subject is “re-interpreted, re-stored, re-inscribed.”⁵ More importantly, for Derrida, Heidegger’s ground-breaking ontological questioning of the subject, in its Cartesian and post-Cartesian forms, is anything but a liquidation.⁶ Derrida’s initial point is not only that there has never been The Subject for anyone, but also that the “place” of the subject has never been liquidated. If the subject is a fable, that does not mean to stop taking it seriously. In the conversation, Derrida appeals to a new determination of the subject, which would not be *pre-deconstructive*, and which must pass through the experience of deconstruction. And yet, Derrida is hesitant to endorse fully the conception of the post-deconstructive subject. In both Heidegger and Levinas, the subject, while articulated as inadequation, non-self-identity, is still modeled on human, as its exemplary representative. The animal, in Heidegger, as Derrida points out, is not *Dasein*. In Levinas, the face of the Other is the human face. A violent exclusion of the animal and the vegetal from subjectivity is the part of the tradition of the Phenomenology and Post-Phenomenology. We read: “Why have I rarely spoken of the “subject” or of “subjectivity,” but rather, here and there, only of “an effect” of “subjectivity”? Because the discourse on the subject, even if it locates difference, inadequation, the dehiscence within auto-affection, and so forth, continues to link subjectivity with man. Even

⁵ Derrida, “Eating Well,” 257.

⁶ Derrida, “Eating Well,” 257.

if it acknowledges that the “animal” is capable of auto-affection (etc.), this discourse obviously does not grant it subjectivity...”⁷

The single thread that runs through the chapters, with distinct and singular thinkers, is the theme of singularity, as distinct from the universal-particular dyadic relation. The post-deconstructive conception of history articulates a singular yet non-essential conception of historical time. Although the thinkers under consideration do not articulate singularity in an identical way, they are united in a *figurative* way. What unites them is the philosophical affirmation of singularity conceived as event, alterity, and non-identity.

Peter Hallward has written on the idea of singularity in postcolonial theory.⁸ Hallward’s is the first rigorous academic attempt to ground postcolonial theory in the philosophical discourse of singularity, to which postcolonial theory, according to Hallward, has always adhered even when it appears to be the discourse of the specific relation. However, there is a subtle distinction between his articulation of singularity and mine. For Hallward, the concept of singularity, unlike the concept of the specific, is essentially non-relational, and “*creates the medium of its own substantial existence or expression*.” The singularity of the Creator-god provides the concept with its exemplary form.”⁹ Following Deleuze (and before that Duns Scotus) Hallward emphasizes the singularity, eventness, of being, and, via Mallarmé or Blanchot, the literality (as opposed to the figurality of consciousness) of the singular. Self-differentiation is the *mode* of the singular. In this conception of singularity of being as an event, Hallward comes close to the conception of singularity that is post-deconstructive. Yet I wish to argue, in a subtle difference from Hallward, that the concept of singularity, in the tradition of deconstruction, is inseparable from the notion of alterity and the essential non-self-identity of the ‘identity.’ It is not the unrepeatable uniqueness that characterizes the singular, but the relation of difference or differance which is again distinct from a certain dialectical mode of self-differentiation of the same, and refers to the *trace* of radical exteriority, more exterior than the opposition of the exterior and the interior. The singular is the singular heteronomy of the instant, which the Derridean terms such as “differance” and “trace” designate. To be sure, the singular is not a relational concept in the sense that concepts

⁷ Derrida, “Eating Well,” 268.

⁸ Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and The Specific* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University press, 2001).

⁹ Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial*, 2.

such as the specific and the universal are. Throughout the present study I maintain the thesis that it is the singular relation of the Other, which is anterior to the phenomenological and the ontological relation, that makes the subject singular. Rather than being the transcendental trace as the possibility should be conceived as the event of singularization. It is also the trace of the other time, the singularity of the other time, which is retained and fulfilled in what Benjamin calls the authentic historical time, or the now-time. Repetition belongs to the very core of the singular. It is repetition, or better, repeatability, that singularizes the in-stance of the instant. The repetition of the Other which singularizes me, makes me unique, refers us to what Heidegger and Levinas would call beyond being.

Singularity as the “effect” of repetition or of trace would lead us to a rethinking of the concept of the figural. It is not my point that the singular can be reduced to any idea of the figural as the symbolic. Rather, the figural must be thought *as* literal. This is the insoluble paradox of the singular-universal. The figural relation is distinct from the universal – particular dyad, and the time of the figural should be strictly distinguished from the continuous time. The time-structure of the figural relation is that of the monadic singular-universal. Here I need to make a distinction between two conceptions of figural temporality: *prolepsis* and *metalepsis*. While in the former time is conceived as teleological, where a future is an anticipatory fulfillment of the present, in the latter the temporal movement is a retroactive fulfillment of the past in and for the present. Although *metalepsis* cannot be dissociated from *prolepsis* their structure is essentially different. I want to argue that in Benjamin, and even in Heidegger, the conception of repetition works as *metalepsis*. In the metaleptic structure of repetition, unlike *prolepsis*, the singularity of the ‘past’ instant is retained, while (ful)filled, in the present. This idea of the singularity of repetition is articulated by Benjamin through his conception of the dialectical image. In Benjamin’s dialectical sense, the figural relation does not negate the literality, but is the figure *of* the literal (singular).

Retrospectively, I would like to see the chapters, and the sections, each in itself singular, be read in a figural manner conceived in the way described above. What joins the first two sections, phenomenology and critical theory, is the idea of the singularity conceived as the event of singularization. The theme of the singularity of the subject, the singular experience of heteronomy, in the first section, is repeated, in the second section, in the conception of singular historical time, in the conception of the monadic singular-universal of the now-time. The conception of the time of the other thus finds concretion in the time of history.

The conception of the singular subject, as ‘constituted’ by the time of the Other, is then re-figured, in the third section, in the ironic conception of the postcolonial host subject of history, whose time, as I interpret Wilson Harris and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, is the other time – singular, pressed into singularity, as it were. Indeed, the metaleptic relation between the past and the present is of crucial importance in Harris.

Two chapters in the first section, entitled “Phenomenology/Post-phenomenology, Time and the Subject,” are devoted to the central themes of the work: temporality and/of the subject. In these two chapters, the texts of Heidegger and Levinas are read in a certain relation without thereby attempting a synthesis. The aim, rather, is to place them in juxtaposition in order to bring to a clear view the intimate relationship – antagonism and filiality – between their respective modes of phenomenology.¹⁰ Levinas occupies a special place in the study, through his innovative theorization of subjectivity beyond ontology, of a subject anarchically interpellated by the call of the Other. Levinas’s thought emerged as a critique of Heidegger’s ontology. Yet, it is undeniable that Levinas’s critique of ontology and phenomenology is inconceivable without Heidegger’s fundamental breakthrough in phenomenology. It is not only that Levinas’s crucial notion of ontological separation is inconceivable without Heidegger’s discovery of ontological difference but the thought of the subjectivity as substitution is foreshadowed in Heidegger’s phenomenological description of the temporal structure of care, conscience as call and more.

The thesis I seek to defend in Chapter one is that the phenomenological parenthesizing of the metaphysical subject in *Being and Time* does not dissolve subjectivity in the neutral totality. It is only a step to articulate the conception of subjectivity as the subject of obligation which is expressed in the trope of being-with for the other, that Heidegger’s *magnum opus* should be read as a defense of the ethical singularity of the subject and the otherness of the other.

I attempt to develop this somewhat unorthodox claim through a close reading of *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutic aim in *Being and Time* is to reveal Dasein’s originary temporality as the meaning of care. The temporal structure of care would disclose, in a hermeneutic manner, Dasein’s possible, authentic, wholeness. According to Heidegger, being-with for the other belongs to the essential, ontological structure of

¹⁰ For an elaborate, comparative, discussion of Heidegger and Levinas, see Tina Chanter, *Time, death, and the feminine: Levinas with Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

Dasein. In that sense, it can be argued that the ethical relation remains subservient to the ontological relation. But, there is, in *Being and Time*, a gesture beyond the ontological hermeneutic wholeness of Dasein toward what Heidegger calls “beyond being” and toward a passivity (death and the future), which indicates the *trace* of the entirely other. I attempt to unravel the “beyond being” and the trace of the other in a reading of being-toward-death, conscience as the call of care, discourse, and in Heidegger’s description of the structure of originary temporality. This would then allow us to revisit Heidegger’s concept of *Mitdasein* and argue that the relation of trace and alterity (of the other) structuring *Mitdasein* constitutes Dasein as the subject of obligation.

For Levinas, the Heideggerian concept of ontological difference is trapped in the thought of the horizontality of being. Ontological hermeneutics, according to Levinas, is the structure of thought through which the singularity of the existent is neutralized. In ontology, the question of subjectivity remains correlative with being. Subjectivity would be a moment of the being-totality in which every exception of inwardness is recuperated. In chapter two, as in chapter one, the singular subjectivity and the singular relation with the absolutely Other (articulated as the singular experience of heteronomy) are thought in terms of the temporal structure of the relation. Whereas in Heidegger, as Levinas would argue, the transcendence that characterizes Dasein still remains factitious, and the temporal structure of the being-with for the other is couched in the language of totalization, the time of the subject, in Levinas, is *given* by the event of the Other. Rather than reading Levinas as a transcendental thinker, I insist on the event-ness of the time *of* the Other. The thought of the event of the Other allows Levinas to develop an innovative ‘phenomenology’ that we can call a ‘phenomenology’ of enigma. The enigma, I argue, lies in a secret repetition, the *already* and *again*, that marks the event, what Levinas would call recurrence. In both Heidegger and Levinas time is thought as otherwise than what Derrida would call the time of the line and the line of time. Yet, if, in Heidegger, ec-static temporality, as the meaning of care, is still thought under the project of the being whole of Dasein, that is, under the sign of totality, in Levinas, the *already* and *again* of the event of the Other refer to the time (the lapse of time) without being and presence. Levinas thinks the subject, as the subject in saying, as sensibility, as proximity, that is (un)conditioned by the time of the Other, the time that is anterior to ontological temporalization.

Levinas would call the time of the singular subjectivity messianic, which he would oppose to history. Is the discourse of history necessarily

ontological? Is historical totalization the only response to positivism? Can historical discourse be reconciled with the messianic without becoming a theological dogma? In section II, entitled "Critical Theory of History," I turn to Walter Benjamin (chapter three) for a conception of history and historiography which is not only non-totalizing but also non-ontological, without being positivist, a conception of historicity whose ground is messianic.

It is my belief that Benjamin's historical materialism, his historiography, cannot be understood without taking into account what he describes as the epochal shift in our perception of time and space, that is, modernity. The account of the modern that Benjamin offers is natural historical, in a manner close to Marx who comprehends the economic formation of society as a process of natural history. The experience of the modern, for Benjamin, is devoid of substance; its time is homogeneous and empty. Modernity, in Benjamin's phenomenological description, is that temporal space where experience is characterized by the loss of what is experienced. Benjamin's historical materialism is a response to and a match for the modern experience. Historical materialism seeks to rescue the singular non-identity of the past, – and therein lies the ethical character of Benjamin's historiography – as he reconstellates a particular past with the struggling present in what he famously calls now-time in the form of the dialectical image. It is the dialectical image that, according to Benjamin, is genuinely historical. The historicity of the image lies in its indexicality or figurality, rather than in its relation to essence. The image functions as a *temporal* index only when there exists a non-identity between the past and the present. The image is not an index for the past "the way it really was," i.e. its identity, but for the past's essential difference. In this precise sense, "The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption." On the other hand, and more crucially, the image as a temporal index is synchronic with every present.

It is Benjamin's allegorical method of historical actualization that enounces the now-time in the form of a temporal image that distinguishes Benjamin's method not only from Lukács's and Sartre's method of totalization but also, as I will argue, from Heidegger's method, as it is formulated in the latter's conception of authentic repetition, which, though similar, in many respects, to Benjamin's conception of actualization as repetition, nonetheless thinks history as totalization. Benjamin's historical actualization, on the other hand, must be thought as de-totalizing.¹¹

¹¹ For an insightful discussion of the relation between Benjamin and Heidegger, see Howard Caygill, "Benjamin, Heidegger and the Destruction of Tradition," in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), 1–31.

It *isolates* a specific work, a singular image, from the totality and is thus essentially fragmentary. It then weaves the isolated image in a monadic singular-universal. The method of construction thus presupposes a prior destruction and fragmentation. The involuntary coming to legibility of the image in the specific present justifies its violent expulsion from the historical process and its crystallization into a monadic singular-universal. What is isolated in the singular-universal, Benjamin reminds us, is the figural rather than the temporal, relation between the past and the present. It is because of his *avant-garde* insight that Benjamin refuses to submit the figural relation to the relation of essences.

Now, although Benjamin speaks of the “subject of historical knowledge,” he would question the expressive notion like subject-object of history. Benjamin’s natural history would question such identity. Drawing on Benjamin’s crucial conception of the afterlife of historical understanding, I argue that the notion should be the primary key to the understanding of the subject of historical knowledge. The subject is marked by the trace of the *after*, in other words, by a certain anachrony that the temporality of the after designates. The subject is the *after*-subject. The subject is the *after*-subject, in the sense of a certain *re*-affirmation of the time *of* the after. And that *re*-affirmed after makes the time of the subject “dialectical” and its time a standstill time, as opposed to a continuous progression.

II

The works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha bear witness to the intimate relation between deconstruction and postcolonial theory. One of the fecund moments of their writings is the attempt to think the *singularity* of the subaltern subject *after* the critique of the sovereign subject of the West. If colonial discourse, as an intricate system of representation, *creates* the economy of the self and the other, where the figure of the colonized has been constructed as the self-consolidating other, deconstruction of that representation does not simply reverse the terms of the relationship but overturns *and* displaces the very order of the representation, introduces asymmetry, asymmetric temporality, in between the terms of the relationship in order to formulate the relation between the self and the other in a way *otherwise* than the colonial schema. The complex *temporal* metaphors such as contrapuntality (Said), catachresis (Spivak), and hybridity and third space (Bhabha) are employed to articulate the differential historicities that can contest the grand narratives of universal history without consolidating what Hallward calls the

discourse of the specific (localism, nationalism, racial-ethnic exclusivism).¹² If, however, the postcolonial critique of a universal history is not to degenerate into a positivism of the local, then what is needed is a new determination of history and of the historical subject, which I would like to call singular, or, more rigorously, singular-universal.

The new determination of the postcolonial subject as singular-universal will put into question the mythology of the self-generating 'in-itself' of national community, racial exclusivity, the particularism of the local as antithetical to the global. It is my considered belief that the singular-universal dimension of the postcolonial dwelling, whether conceived as worldliness (Said), or cross-boundary third space (Bhabha), or boundaries of dwelling (Wilson Harris) is irreducibly international, which I want to oppose to the abstract notion of globality. To be sure, the relation between postcolonial (anti-colonial) theories and internationalist discourse is ambiguous. It is not only that the abstract universalism often serves as the ideological apotheosis of the global capitalist order, to put it bluntly, but, more critically, that the equally abstract internationalism of the grand narratives of the progressive social movements simply offers the symmetric opposition that consolidates the dominant global pattern. I want to re-assert the point that the rescuing of the singularity of the postcolonial subject is the *task* of the critic and historiographer since the singularity of the subaltern subject (to use Spivak's term) is not a self-evident fact, but is rather suppressed in the dominant discourses of globalization and even in the progressive meta-narratives. The double task of the postcolonial critic then is to imagine and enunciate the singular-universal conception of dwelling that resists the models of universal history *and*, concomitantly, to affirm a conception of a singular subjectivity otherwise than the model of the sovereign, autonomous, subject, which I would like to call the host subject of history.

In section III, I focus on the critical writings of Wilson Harris and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It is in their writings that I find not only a deconstructive critique (implicit in Harris's phenomenology) of the colonial historical representation, in its subtle forms, but also the ethico-political dimension of the singular question of the postcolonial subject and its unique temporality, which exceeds the colonial schema of

¹² For a rigorous reflection on the theme of the singular, rather than the specific, in Edward Said (the contrapuntal configuration as singular), Homi Bhabha (the singular difference, rather than the specificity of difference, of the hybridity and the third space), and Gayatri Spivak (the singularity of the subaltern), see chapter 1 of Peter Hallward's *Absolutely Postcolonial*.

subjectivation. Now, I do not want to conflate Harris and Spivak. They would surely differ on certain essential questions. Harris would insist on the positive, essentially non-colonial, moment in the imaginative discourse of the 'colonized,' whereas Spivak would relentlessly cling to what she calls an affirmative *critique*. But in seeking to affirm the singularity of the postcolonial subject they bring to the postcolonial critique a discourse of responsibility without which the political would degenerate into interest games and historiography into positivist monument of victimhood.

In chapter four, I read Harris's unique postcolonial phenomenology of temporal dwelling and space, which I call ironic phenomenology. Harris's thought is ironic in that he has, as I read him, pursued phenomenologically the asymmetry and breach between the art of fulfillment and the model of consolidation. The art of fulfillment or transfiguration involves a *breach* in the time of consolidation, in the time of "sovereign violence." The fulfillment presents a new constellation of time(s). The idea of constellation (rather than the totality) would prove to be crucial in our reading of Harris. The constellation, in Harris, does not transcend the breach in order to construct a totality, but arrives at what Harris would call a re-visionary and imaginative blending of the past and the future (through forward and backward movements) across a breach, a discontinuity, a rift. The re-visionary constellation offers a spatial and temporal transfiguration of the postcolonial divide, which is the essential moment of the postcolonial dwelling and is the hallmark of epic. The postcolonial, or if we may use the word, the 'modern,' divide, which is the chronological divide that the colonial 'time' consolidates, is the divide through which to enter into the realm of the temporal transfiguration. Herein lies the irony of the postcolonial predicament. What I am concerned with, in my reading of Harris, is precisely the temporal dimension of the irony, which I pursue through a close reading of Harris's unique phenomenology of language.

The reading of Harris's phenomenology will lead us to the necessary place that the conception of the host subject occupies in his phenomenology. In our reading, the host subject of (the postcolonial) dwelling is the singular, ironic, subject that is otherwise than the model of the subject as self-sufficient identity, the model of the sovereign subject. Through a phenomenology of suffering and wound Harris offers us the image of the ironic subject as the subject of what I would like to call finite freedom.

Harris's phenomenology requires as its essential element the host subject of history. Harris rigorously pursues his conception of the art of fulfillment and transfiguration, which he opposes to the model of consolidation and historical convention, in his phenomenological history. It would be a

crucial argument in my reading of Harris that postcolonial history, the singular-universal significance of postcolonial history, lies in the conception of a temporal passage in which is enacted – repeated and displaced – the original experience of the Middle Passage. If the idea of a transfigured community is the hallmark of the postcolonial philosophy of history, and in that eminent sense it is epic, then that community is never a self-evident fact but belongs to the conception of a passage. The idea of the host subject that Harris finds in the Caribbean and Guyanese myths and tales is the host subject of that passage. Harris's conception of a passage distinguishes postcolonial historiography from the dominant model of positivist representation and offers the historiography the ethical dimension.

If the singular-universality of the postcolonial dwelling and of the host subject of the postcolonial passage is what distinguishes Harris's thinking, then the singular itinerary of the subaltern subject, suppressed by imperialism, constitutes the deconstructive core of Spivak's critical works. The ethical dimension of Spivak's critical thinking, however, refuses easily available moral positions. Rather, her critical *setting to work of deconstruction* maintains the critical focus on the aporia between the epistemological and the ethical in that the task is shifted from knowing the subaltern to learning to learn from the subaltern. If Spivak's work can be seen as marking the avant-garde position in the politics of representation, then that avant-gardism is aware of the gap between the dogmatic and the critical.

In chapter five, I approach Spivak's critical theory through her interpretive reading and use (setting to work) of Derrida. In the first section of the chapter, I attempt to offer an interpretive overview of Spivak's engagement with Derrida. I develop, in detail, the theoretical implications of Spivak's interpretation of deconstruction as an irreducibly nominalist enterprise, more precisely, as catachrestic nominalism. Yet, I argue that what gives nominalism a deconstructive turn, both in Derrida and in Spivak, is that deconstruction employs the old names and signs only in order to reveal the "unnameable" and the "*unheard of thoughts*". It is thus not just the nominalism but the *limits* of nominalism that is the concern of Spivak's setting to work of deconstruction. To put it more precisely, it is the singularity of the Other that marks the limit of nominalism. As I read Spivak, it is this limit thinking that keeps alive, for Spivak, the question of the subject.

Spivak calls the setting to work of deconstruction the work of supplementation. In the second section of the chapter, I primarily focus on the significance of the supplementation. The responsibility that marks the

subject, the subaltern subject, is what, following Levinas, I would like to call a supplementary responsibility, which distinguishes the concept of host subject, finite in its very constitution, from the sovereign subject.

The singularity of the subaltern, the singularity that cannot be generalized according to the hegemonic logic, is the entry point of Spivak's historiographic thought. Spivak does not offer a new theory of the subject nor does she offer a whole new historiography. Rather, as a deconstructionist, Spivak uses "old" names and models in order to reveal their limits, in order to repeat *and* displace the very terms of the subalternity and of historiography. For Spivak, evading the task of deconstructing representations in the name of, say, an immediate access to the singularity of the subaltern would amount to dogmatism and positivism. Rather the task is to trace the singularity in the force field of representation. The tracing of the singularity of the subaltern subject means, for the historiographer, a relation of alterities. The seminal texts like "Can the subaltern speak?" or "Rani of Sirmur" are also allegorical texts where the historiographer (Spivak) enters the passage of alterity, the passage that reveals the frontiers of the historiography itself. The idea of the passage and its host subject remains crucial in Spivak's historiography. If read as an allegory of the passage, an essentially transformative question, the response to the discomfiting question as to whether the subaltern can speak is affirmative: yes, yes.

PART ONE

PHENOMENOLOGY/POST-PHENOMENOLOGY, TIME AND SUBJECT

CHAPTER ONE

OF THE LINE: TEMPORALITY, ETHICAL REPETITION, AND SUBJECT IN *BEING AND TIME*

It is a well received idea that Heidegger, along with Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, puts the subject “under erasure,” setting the theoretical stage for the philosophical anti-humanism of post-war French thought. But this “erasure,” as part of his overall aim to deconstruct the tradition of metaphysics, to retrieve the original experiences of the finitude of being, raises the suspicion that Heidegger’s famous decentring of the subject dissolves the subject in the neutral horizon of being, which may already subsume the question of ethical singularity within an anonymous totality. This is a concern powerfully raised, among others, by Emmanuel Levinas. I engage with Levinas’s critique of Heidegger’s ontology in the next chapter. Yet, without anachronistically projecting Levinas into Heidegger’s phenomenological hermeneutics, I wish to argue that in *Being and Time* the phenomenological parenthesizing of the metaphysical definition of the subject, whose most succinct formulation, according to Heidegger, is to be found in the *cogito sum* of Descartes, does not dissolve the subject within a neutral totality. Rather, this parenthesizing is only a step to articulate what I would like to call the subject of obligation, which is expressed, in *Being and Time*, through the trope of being-with for the other. *Being and Time*, if read against the grain of a certain Heidegger orthodoxy, is a defense of the singularity of the subject as the subject of obligation, and of the otherness of the other.

I attempt to develop the conception of the singularity of the subject of obligation by way of the conception of the temporality as the meaning of care, which is the essential aspect of *Being and Time*. My argument rests on the unorthodox claim that an irreducible heterotemporality is implicit in Heidegger’s description of the temporal structure of Dasein. The heterotemporality, expressed in the structural co-belonging of being and non-being (pointing to what Heidegger calls “beyond being”), is constitutive of Dasein as being-with for the other, which is how Heidegger articulates the singular subjectivity and distinguishes it from the self-sameness and substantivity of the self. I will develop the argument through a close reading of being-toward-death, of the conscience as the call of care, of discourse, and through Heidegger’s original phenomenological description

of the structure of originary temporality, which would then allow us to revisit the concept of *MitDasein* and argue that the relation of trace and alterity (of the other) structuring Dasein constitutes Dasein as the subject of obligation.

The Hermeneutics of Facticity

From his post-First World War writings and lectures onwards, Heidegger began to develop an innovative rapprochement of Husserlian Phenomenology and the tradition of hermeneutics. The effort culminated in the fecund articulation of the hermeneutic phenomenology in *Being and Time*.¹ Heidegger bases phenomenology on the “hermeneutics of facticity.” Phenomenology becomes “hermeneutic phenomenology” when the point of departure is Dasein’s understanding of being. By replacing Husserl’s transcendental I with the factual existence of Dasein, which provides the ground for his existential ontology, Heidegger places the focus on the intrinsically hermeneutic dimension of phenomenology. On the other hand, hermeneutics is determined ontologically beyond its traditional scope of an art of interpretation. Hermeneutics receives its primary and original meaning of the interpretation of the existentiality of existence, and phenomenological ontology achieves the character of *hermeneuein*.²

Why is it that I begin the discussion with Heidegger’s original articulation of hermeneutics or hermeneutic phenomenology? It is because Heidegger’s famous “destruction” of the metaphysics of the subject as substance cannot be judged outside of the context of his hermeneutic phenomenology, which I read as the hermeneutics of facticity. In Heidegger’s hermeneutics, the self is determined in terms of what he would call an antecedent transposition of Dasein, in terms of what Heidegger calls the existential “standing out” or “withstanding” in the openness of being. To be a self is surely one feature of the essence of that being which exists, but existence does not consist in being a self. Rather, being a self is grounded in the existential ontology of Dasein. The hermeneutics of facticity in *Being and Time* offers the ontico-ontological structure of the existential

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh; revised by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as BT followed by the appropriate page numbers.

² For a commentary on Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, see chapter 2 of Otto Poggeler, *Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking*, trans. Daniel Margurshak and Sigmund Barber (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc. 1987).

ontology. In this section I shall attempt to explicate the “circular” strategy of the hermeneutic phenomenology. Before attempting the explication it may be in order to clarify what the idea of circularity entails.

Already in the Introduction of *Being and Time*, Heidegger reflects, in advance, on the charge of the “vicious” circularity of his “method” of grounding beings in the meaning of being. “Presupposing” being or “this guiding look at being,” Heidegger suggests, is not a matter of grounding by deduction, but “laying bare” the ground (BT 7). He also describes the method as “genealogy” which should not be “construed deductively” (BT 10). The point of departure is not arbitrary in that “the access to the phenomenon” must be “wrested,” and “passage through the prevalent coverings must secure their own method” (BT 34).

In paragraph 63 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger elaborates the temporal structure of care and completes the hermeneutic discussion of the analytic of Dasein. He then returns to the discussion of the “circular” strategy employed in *Being and Time*. The existential analytic that, as genealogy, bares the ground of existence has the character of “doing violence” (BT 298). Interpretive violence is part of the “circular” strategy of *Being and Time*. The charge of the circularity and of the arbitrariness of interpretive violence, however, fails to recognize, Heidegger reminds us, that the “circle” of understanding, instead of being a tautology, belongs to “a basic kind of being of Dasein” and that “this being is constituted as care” (BT 301). In an important passage Heidegger states:

Talk about the “circle” in understanding expresses the failure to recognize two things: (1) That understanding itself constitutes a basic kind of being of Dasein. (2) That this being [Sein] is constituted as care. To deny the circle, to make a secret of it or even to wish to overcome it means to anchor this misunderstanding once and for all. Rather our attempt must aim at leaping into this “circle” primordially and completely, so that even at the beginning of our analysis of Dasein we make sure that we have a complete view of the circular being of Dasein. (BT 301)

This passage is one of the most important statements on “method” in *Being and Time*. The hermeneutic circle, which is founded on the ontic-ontological modality of being of Dasein, is not only not arbitrary, but it is also not objectively present (*vorhanden*). Only a *prior* leap can open the “circle” for us. The necessity and the possibility of leaping into the circle are not chronologically prior to the circle of understanding, but belong to the temporal dimension of the circle.

Let me return to the discussion of facticity, which provides the link between phenomenological ontology and hermeneutics. The discussion

will hinge on Heidegger's term being-in-the-world and will make clear Heidegger's break with the Cartesian notion of the *substantiality* of subject. Let me quickly trace the steps leading to the notion of facticity. In the very beginning of *Being and Time* Heidegger offers justification of the analysis of Dasein. Dasein discloses *phenomenologically* the radical experience of being in that "in the being of this being it is related to its being" (BT 41). In paragraphs 9 and 12 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger offers a formal and ontological characterization of Dasein: "Dasein is a being which is related understandingly in its being toward that being [Sein]" (BT 53). This is a formal concept of existence whose mode of being, Heidegger suggests, is otherwise than objective presence (*vorhandenheit*). The characteristic of the being of Dasein is not to be found in any 'what ness' or objectively present attributes, but rather in the "possible ways for it to be" (BT 41). When translated ontologically, that definition means that the problematic of its being or of its understanding of being is to be developed out of the structure of existentiality of its existence. Ontologically, Dasein is not a case and instance of a genus of beings as objectively present. Rather, an "*always-being-my-own-being* [*Jemeinigkeit*]" characterizes Dasein (BT 42). Thus we are led to the problematic of the mode of facticity of Dasein. Heidegger begins his discussion of the facticity of Dasein by reflecting on the existential notion of being-in that is constitutive of being of Dasein. One of the crucial meanings of being-in lies in *Ich bin* (I am) which means I dwell. The import of this translation goes beyond etymological play. *Ich bin* implies that being-in of Dasein is "being together with"["Sein bei"] the world (BT 55). Being-in-the-world, as existential, rather than being the adjacency of two objectively present beings called Dasein and "world," is essentially related to the possible ways of Dasein's to be. Thus, for Heidegger, the facticity surely implies the factuality of Dasein. But the "factuality" of Dasein is different from "the factual occurrence of a kind of stone" (BT 56). Rather, "[t]he factuality of the fact of Dasein, as the way in which every Dasein actually is, we call its *facticity*. ... The concept of facticity implies that an "innerworldly" being has being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its "destiny" with the being of those beings which it encounters within its own world" (BT 56). Facticity, as existential, is, in Heidegger's terms, an ontic-ontological or preontological concept. The question of existence is broached, Heidegger writes, only through existence itself (BT 11). "Thus *fundamental ontology*, from which alone all other ontologies can originate, must be sought in the *existential analysis of Dasein*" (BT 12). In that way, the fundamental ontology is grounded in the ontic. The concept of

facticity, which is the concretization of the phenomenology of intentional consciousness, constitutes the principal ground of Heidegger's break with the Husserlian phenomenological *reduction* that seeks to recover the pure field of the phenomenology of transcendental subjectivity.³

There is a methodical stepping back, in *Being and Time*, from the structures of consciousness to the existential, ontological, structures through which entities are determined in their being. In this methodical retreat, the phenomenological transcendentalism, instead of being simply dissolved, is grounded fundamentally in, and thus dis-placed into, the ordinary phenomenon of factual structures of what Heidegger would call being-in- the-world.

Dasein, whose mode of being is the understanding of being in its being, is *already* being-in-the-world as heedful and circumspective taking care of things in the environmental world. According to Heidegger, the facticity of Dasein implies that being-in-the-world of Dasein, as a unity, "has already dispersed itself in definite ways of being-in, perhaps even split itself up" (BT 57). This explains Heidegger's employment of care (*sorge*) as the fundamental structure of Dasein. The German word *sorge* means both "care" and "worry." Both meanings of the word are important for Heidegger. Care or being *concerned* about its own being is Dasein itself.

It is true that the facticity and the always already character of reference constitutive of Dasein, which Heidegger calls *significance*, marks Heidegger's major shift from the modern metaphysics of the *immanent* subject. However, the critique of immanence does not lead Heidegger to seek transcendence in the "object" or in things outside of Dasein. Rather, the originality of Heidegger's phenomenology lies in locating transcendence in the "subject." In this context, let me refer briefly to Heidegger's 1927 lecture course at the University of Marburg, entitled, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. In the lecture, Heidegger raises the question of transcendence in the context of the problem of intentionality or Dasein's intentional comportment with things. The intentionality or directedness of Dasein toward things does not mean that Dasein first leaps into the outside from its supposed monadic interiority. Here, Heidegger rigorously introduces the conception of a phenomenological horizon in the form of what he calls the antecedent transposition of Dasein. It is only on the basis of an "*antecedent* transposition" that Dasein

³ For Heidegger's most elaborate discussion of the phenomenological method, see chapters 2 and 3 of Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

can come back to itself from the direction of things.⁴ What does the antecedent transposition mean? This refers us again to Heidegger's notion of apriority of being-in-the-world. In Dasein's comportment with others and things is already implied something like an "*antecedent understanding of world, significance.*"⁵

World, in Heidegger's phenomenological ontological sense, is not a sum of extant objects, is rather that which is beyond all objects, is understood beforehand when objects encounter us. World's existence as *beyond*, rather than its objective presence with other objects, is what determines being-in-the-world, that is, Dasein's self-understanding. Heidegger would further argue that being-in-the-world, as unity – the belonging together of the self and the world constituted by the "equiprimordiality" of being-in-the-world, that is, Dasein – determines originally the "subject" and the I – Thou relation. Thus the notion of the antecedent understanding of being-in-the world leads Heidegger to conclude that being-in-the-world as Dasein is the *transcendent*. Transcendence literally means to step over, to pass over, and to surpass. In opposition to a theoretical position that looks for transcendence in the sphere of the object, in that which lies simply outside the subject, Heidegger locates transcendence in the "subject," that is, Dasein itself. Exactly that which is called immanence, the sphere of the subject, is intrinsically and alone transcendent. Parenthetically, locating transcendence in the subject, however, means that the so-called solipsistic interiority of the subject is *destroyed*.

To continue, according to Heidegger, the *beyond* (the *epekeina*) as such belongs to the mode of being of Dasein. "The overstepping as such, or that whose mode of being must be defined precisely by this overstepping, properly understood, is the Dasein."⁶ Now, it is Heidegger's argument that Dasein's being beyond is the possibility of self and I-Thou relation. In a language apparently akin to Hegel (of *Phenomenology of Spirit*), Heidegger suggests that self-hood is founded on transcendence. But, contrary to Hegel, transcendence that belongs to self-hood is not reducible to consciousness.⁷ Essence of self-hood is more originary than

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 161. Also see, Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Ground," trans. William McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 107–125.

⁵ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems*, 296.

⁶ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems*, 299.

⁷ In the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel draws the distinction between "immediate existence" (*Dasein*) and consciousness. What marks the difference is the decisive relation to death. Hegel writes: "Whatever is confined within the limits of a natural life

consciousness. Thus, by locating transcendence in the newly determined subject Heidegger radically puts in question the metaphysical distinction between subject and object (substance). However, at this point, Heidegger introduces an argument that may disturb his horizontal phenomenology. Heidegger remarks that Dasein's being beyond "is" *beyond being*. I shall attempt to argue later that the notion of beyond being is implicitly, yet crucially, present in Heidegger's conception of temporality as the truth of care and gives his phenomenology an irreducibly *ethical* significance. Yet, it should be pointed out that the thought of "beyond being" remains, somehow, subordinate to the (ontological) priority of the world in *Being and Time*.

Facticity of Dasein has led us to arrive at outside-itself as the ontological structure of Dasein. The accepted translation of Dasein is being-there. But Heidegger's characterization of Dasein, being-there, should be more properly translated as being-its-there. "The Dasein is its Da, its here-there, in which it is here for itself and in which others are there with it..."⁸ Thus, instead of being immanent, Dasein 'contains' a relation of exteriority and 'beyond,' which is confirmed by Heidegger's ontic–ontological characteristic of Dasein as being-thrown.

In paragraph 29 of *Being and Time*, the referential structure of Dasein is translated *ontologically* as attunement (*befindlichkeit*) whose *ontic* manifestation will be mood (*stimmung*) or being in a mood. Mood, in Heidegger's description, is the primary disclosure of the world and is more originary than any state of mind in the psychological sense. In mood, says Heidegger, being is manifested as a burden, as being delivered over to... (BT 131). Being in a mood brings being to its there (BT 131). Mood is the ontic manifestation of Dasein's ontological character of thrownness

cannot by its own efforts go beyond its immediate existence; but it is driven beyond it by something else, and this uprooting entails its death. Consciousness, however, is explicitly the *Notion* of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself." G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (# 80), trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 51.

Jean Hyppolite suggests that Hegel, in a properly Kantian manner, is thinking of the two levels of consciousness, of the *doubling* that is characteristic of consciousness. For Kant, what makes the objectivity of the object possible is transcendental "I think" itself. But, as Hyppolite suggests, the objectivity is immanent not so much to the common consciousness, but rather to what in the common consciousness transcends it, in other words, transcendental consciousness. Consciousness, in this sense, is a mode. The truth of common consciousness is realized in what transcends it, in what absolves itself from itself. Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 16.

⁸ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems*, 300–301.

(*Geworfenheit*). “Beings of the character of Dasein are there in such a way that they find themselves in their thrownness” (BT 132). At this stage of his analysis of attunement and thrownness, Heidegger links, in a hermeneutic manner, the phenomenon of being thrown to Dasein’s *mode* of factual existing as being-possible, to which I shall return shortly. To translate this, however, in ontic terms, there is a time lag that marks Dasein’s being-in. Dasein, Heidegger would suggest, has always already, thus originally, gone astray. Dasein must have always already found itself not in seeking itself but in turning away from ‘itself,’ the turning away which is always in the mode of attunement.

Facticity, in Heidegger, is a dynamic concept, which sets it apart from the factual presence of a stone. Now, this dynamic potentiality in the concept of facticity is articulated through the conception of the *project* character of Dasein and its *possibilities*, whose ontological hermeneutic significance is decisive in *Being and Time*. Equiprimordially with attunement, says Heidegger, *understanding* constitutes the being of Dasein, or, more precisely, the fundamental *mode* of its being (BT 138). According to Heidegger, understanding, as existential, is related to Dasein not as objectively present being, but as always being-possible, as the taking care of its “ownmost” possibility. Yet, for Heidegger, being-possible, as existential, is distinct from logical possibility and from a conception of possibility that is not yet actualized possibility, only a possibility. Rather, being-possible is primordial. A distinction must also be drawn between being-possible as the ontic-ontological mode of Dasein and any free-floating potentiality of being. Dasein always finds itself in the *definite* mode of attunement and possibility. Which means that “Dasein is a being-possible which is entrusted to itself, it is *thrown possibility* throughout” (BT 139). Dasein is abandoned to the possibility, which it is (BT 139). However, this being abandoned does not indicate a lack or privation in Dasein’s being-in, which can then be filled or even sublated. It means that Dasein *is* its own ground, thrown ground, as potentiality-of-being, but *not* of its own accord. “Even though it has *not* laid the ground *itself*, it rests in the weight of it, which mood reveals to it as a burden” (BT 273). How *is* Dasein its own ground? Heidegger’s answer: by projecting into the thrown ground which is *care*. In projecting, understanding does not thematically grasp the possibilities themselves upon which it projects. Heidegger’s point is that such thematization would take its character of possibilities away from the projecting and would degrade it to the level of intended content. Rather, in projecting, project already throws the possibility before itself and lets it *be* as possibility (BT 141). In that sense, the projected possibility, in the realm

of factual being, is not only transcendent to actuality, but to the possibility itself, understood as the given, subjective possibility. The transcendence *of* possibility (double genitive) is what is essential to Dasein.

Heidegger defines Dasein as a being “held out into the nothingness of being [seyn], held as relation” (BT 7). As being-possible, as already-ahead-of-itself, Dasein is the *not*, the difference itself. Heidegger, however, cautions against conflating the nothing constitutive of Dasein with a certain ‘dialectical’ idea of negation. Rather than being the result of negation, the *not* of the difference, of the relational difference, constitutes the positive characteristic of the being of Dasein. Heidegger would write, in his essay ‘What is Metaphysics,’ that the nothing does not appear in our uncanniness apart from beings as a whole. “Rather, the nothing makes itself known with beings and in beings expressly as a slipping away of the whole.”⁹ This is precisely the meaning of the phenomenological disclosure of the worldliness of the world. Heidegger would also suggest, significantly, that we come always too late with such negation. The nothing already meets us as a “repelling gesture” that closes in on us. Dasein is *a priori* held out into the nothing and thus is already beyond beings as a whole, and yet at one with beings.¹⁰ The facticity of Dasein is the mode of its *finite* possibility.

Already-being-ahead, being abandoned to the nothingness *of* being, means that Dasein is at the same time open and closed off, the phenomenon Heidegger describes, in the context of the spatiality of Dasein, as de-distancing. The expression “de-distancing” should be understood in an active and transitive sense (BT 102). Already, Heidegger defines place as definite “over there” and the “there” of a useful thing *belonging there*. This belonging there of useful things, held in view in advance, is what Heidegger terms the *region* (BT 100).

The regional character of Dasein, in Heidegger’s phenomenological description, shows itself as de-distancing. De-distancing, as existential, discovers, in the first place, remoteness itself which is a categorial determination of beings unlike Dasein. De-distancing, as existential, can be understood as a kind of double negative, which means, rather than negation and appropriation of distance, distancing *of* distance (double genitive) which ‘produces’ as its ‘effect,’ as it were, directionality itself. Directionality is a mode of de-distancing. De-distancing already points to the temporal dimension of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. De-distancing is

⁹ Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics,” trans. David Farrell Krell, in *Pathmarks*, 90.

¹⁰ Heidegger, “Metaphysics,” 90.

temporal because otherwise it will be only understood as the ontic and categorial remoteness of beings unlike Dasein. If we recall Heidegger's interpretive definition of Dasein as being-its-there or being-the-there, then de-distancing, as existential, belongs to the spacing of Dasein. "Da-ein is initially never here, but over there. From this over there it comes back to its here" (BT 105). "Dasein is essentially de-distancing" (BT 102). The meaning of spatiality is thus already projected, though not explicitly stated, into the temporal being of Dasein. The temporal character of Dasein's existential spatiality and de-distancing is phenomenologically described in chapter IV of division II of *Being and Time* (BT 349–352). Dasein, as a thrown possibility, as de-distancing, according to Heidegger, *dwells* in the farness from itself of what is at hand. The de-distancing or farness from itself of what is at hand is temporal in that the distance or farness is not a measurable distance and is not categorially determined. This originary line or location of de-distancing is 'what' Dasein can *never cross over* (BT 105). What Heidegger calls the "Limit situations" or "borderline situations" of existence reveal the temporal passage of de-distancing. Heidegger borrows the term from Karl Jaspers.¹¹ De-distancing is the limit or the un-crossable (as crossing of) line belonging to and de-limiting Dasein. As spatial, and as factual, Dasein dwells in the line of de-distancing.

Being-toward-death, Ethical Repetition, Temporality

Let us recall that facticity means that Dasein exists in a relation of modality, rather than a simple opposition, of the ontic and the ontological. The transcendence that marks Dasein's existence also marks Dasein's finitude. This modality is the basis of Heidegger's famous characterization of being of Dasein as care. As a self-projective being, Dasein projects upon its own potentiality-for-being. Dasein *is* being-possible. This being-possible means, phenomenologically, that "Dasein is always already *ahead* of itself in its being ... is always already "beyond itself"" (BT 185). Heidegger articulates the meaning of the being-ahead-of itself as the structure of *being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world* (BT 185). That an ontic-ontological modality of the being-in of Dasein is implied by this structure is evident in Heidegger's further explication of this structure. Being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in... is primordially a whole. But the wholeness of already

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, "Comments on Karl Jaspers's *Psychology of Worldviews*," trans. John van Buren, in *Pathmarks*, 1–38.

ahead, expressed differently, means that Dasein is always factual (BT 186). The primordial wholeness of Dasein is, according to Heidegger, already *fragmentary*. The 'whole' is ontic-ontological difference itself. The being of Dasein, as ontological difference, "fills in the significance of the term *care*, which is used in a purely ontological and existential way" (BT 186). As we will see later, the factual mode of the being-in of Dasein is expressed in the modal extremity, rather than a simple opposition, of the authenticity and inauthenticity of the being of Dasein. The structure of care as the authentic being of Dasein implies, rather than negates, the modal extremity of Dasein. And the modal character of Dasein structures Heidegger's conception of time.

Heidegger's conception of time, which is the theme of division II of the published part of *Being and Time*, is a repetition of the existential analytic of Dasein of the first division. Heidegger repeats and projects the crucial phenomenological findings of the existential analytic of the first division into the temporal ground of the being of Dasein. Before entering into this crucial part of *Being and Time* let us note briefly what Heidegger wants us to set aside. Let me briefly refer to a text which is described by Hans-George Gadamer as the "original form" of *Being and Time*.¹² The text under consideration is Heidegger's lecture at Marburg in 1924, *The Concept of Time*.¹³

The lecture was presented to a theological audience. Heidegger begins the lecture by asking the question: what is time? In a way appropriate for a theological audience Heidegger begins by reflecting on the opposition between time and eternity. If the meaning of time lies in eternity, then the point of departure and path of inquiry are indicated in advance: from eternity to time. Time must be understood on the basis of eternity. But "the philosopher does not believe. If the philosopher asks about time, then he has resolved *to understand time in terms of time...*"¹⁴ This point should be of crucial importance in Heidegger's conception of temporality in not only this lecture but also in *Being and Time*. But it will be Heidegger's argument that thinking time out of time should not be understood as *tautology* (time is time), but as thinking of time from out of more 'original'

¹² Hans-George Gadamer, "Martin Heidegger and Marburg Theology" in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 36.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time* (the bilingual edition), trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

For an elaborate discussion of the text, see John Sallis, *Echoes After Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 44–55.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *The Concept*, P. 2E.

temporality (“beyond being”). Correlate to this will be my argument that a hetero temporality is implicit in Heidegger’s concept of time in *Being and Time*, and that the hetero temporality is what *makes possible* (originally) the mode of being-possible of Dasein. In the lecture, Heidegger insists that both modern physics, such as Einstein’s theory of relativity, and the tradition of the philosophical conception of time established fundamentally by Aristotle have the character of measuring of time. Clock time exemplifies the measurement of time based on the now-point. “A clock is a physical system in which an identical temporal sequence is constantly repeated... The clock provides an identical duration that constantly repeats itself, a duration to which one can always have recourse.”¹⁵ The duration of clock time is identical because it is based on an arbitrarily fixed now-point. This time, Heidegger says, is then uniform and homogeneous. The measurement of time becomes possible because of the uniformity and homogeneity.¹⁶ In the clock time, time itself is neutralized, so to speak. The future and the past are already interpreted on the basis of a fixed present, i.e. the now-point. The past is the no-longer present, and the future is the not-yet present. Time is thus understood as a sequence of nows that can be counted. Clock time is characterized as “irreversible” and “homogeneous.”¹⁷

Anticipating *Being and Time*, Heidegger grounds time in the phenomenology of the being-in of Dasein, in Dasein’s being-possible, in its running ahead to its past, that is, in its essential futurity.¹⁸ *What-ness* of time is dis-placed into *who* time is, and then into *how* Dasein *is* time. The lecture ends with the identity of time and Dasein: I am time, and there are, thus, many times. In *Being and Time* this identity of time and Dasein will appear to be ambiguous though not abandoned.

In paragraph 45 of division II of *Being and Time* Heidegger, in preparing the discussion of the temporal structure of care, raises the question of how to articulate the primordial whole of Dasein in our hermeneutic fore-sight and fore-having. Up to the end of division I, Heidegger concedes, the discussion could not lay claim to the primordality. Is not Dasein, as *existentiell*, originally inauthentic and fragmentary? Since everyday Dasein is, after all, “between” birth and death how is it possible to bring Dasein as a

¹⁵ Heidegger, *The Concept*, 4E.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *The Concept*, 5E.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *The Concept*, 17E-18E.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *The Concept*, 12E-14E.

In John Sallis’s slightly different translation, we read: “It is Dasein’s running-ahead [Vorlaufen] to its goneness [Vorbei] as its extreme possibility, which impends with certainty and complete indefiniteness.” Sallis, *Echoes*, 50.

whole to view? But the idea of existence, according to Heidegger, also includes authentic potentiality-of-being which is made visible as a mode of care (BT 216). The aporia leads to the heart of ontic-ontological difference. Without renouncing, in advance, the aporia, Heidegger prepares the passage through the aporia by constructing the famous death scene or what Heidegger calls being-toward-death. It will be my thesis, however, that there is a gesture toward passivity in Heidegger's description of being-toward-death, which renders problematic the discourse of authentic solitude and autonomy of Dasein.

Death is an existential phenomenon and, as Heidegger writes emphatically, should be properly distinguished from witnessing the death of others. For Dasein, death, ontologically conceived, should be experienced and understood "as my own." It is not only that death is always my own experience but, more crucially, it is only through death that Dasein comes back to the self and becomes irreplaceable. Death, in its extremity, *singularizes* Dasein. Death is thus Dasein's singular and nonrelational possibility. Another essential aspect of Heidegger's account of the existential concept of death is that Dasein does not simply come to an end nor is it fulfilled in the end. Rather it exists in such a way that its not-yet *belongs* to it (BT 234). Thus the already not-yet of Dasein signifies *not* a being-at-an-end of Dasein, in which case Dasein would be posited as something objectively present, but rather a *being toward the end* of this being (BT 236). Heidegger distinguishes the not-yet from something outstanding (something lacking) which is yet to be actualized and argues that Dasein *is always already its not yet* as long as it is (BT 235). Notice the following italicized line from *Being and Time*:

The phenomenon of the not-yet has been taken from the ahead-of-itself; no more than the structure of care in general, can it serve as a higher court that would rule against a possible, existent, wholeness; indeed this ahead of itself first makes possible such being toward-the-end. (BT 248)

By grounding the being-toward-the-end in the phenomenon of *already not-yet* of Dasein Heidegger reverses, by a shift of terrain, any teleological understanding of the the concept of death and, by implication, of the temporality of Dasein. Instead of being fulfilled in death (Heidegger's analogy is ripeness of fruit), death remains as the *already* receding (thus *always coming*) possibility *belonging* to Dasein. I shall come to this important point shortly. But, in Heidegger's own term, we have not yet arrived at Dasein's authentic relation to death and, consequently, at its possible wholeness of being.

So what is Dasein's proper relation to death? The answer lies in Heidegger's concept of death as *possibility*. Dasein *relates* to death as *imminence* (BT 232). Dasein relates, singularly, that is, to the imminent possibility of death. In an important paragraph we read:

Death is a possibility of being that Dasein always has to take upon itself. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-of-being. In this possibility, Dasein is concerned about its being-in-the-world absolutely. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be there. When Dasein is imminent to itself as this possibility, it is *completely* thrown back upon its ownmost potentiality-of-being. Thus imminent to itself, all relations to other Dasein are dissolved in it. This nonrelational ownmost possibility is at the same time the most extreme one. As a potentiality of being, Dasein is unable to bypass the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. (BT 241)

The relation to possibility does not, however, mean awaiting death or planning to realize death as future actuality. "If being-toward-death has to disclose understandingly the possibility which we have characterized as *such*, then in such being-toward-death this possibility must not be weakened, it must be understood *as possibility*, cultivated *as possibility*, and *endured as possibility* in our relation to it" (BT 250). This relation to death as possibility, which is distinct from awaiting or expecting death, is what Heidegger calls anticipation. Possibility has to be sustained as anticipation.

The anticipation of possibility, though futural, should not be conflated with awaiting or expecting an actualized possibility or with making something real available. Rather, the possibility "reveals itself as something which knows no measure at all, no more or less, but means the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence" (BT 251). As the anticipation of possibility, suggests Heidegger, being-toward-death first *makes* this possibility *possible* (BT 251). Here, finally, we arrive at the possible hermeneutic and existential wholeness of Dasein. For, according to Heidegger, being-toward-death *as* anticipation or anticipatory possibility reveals Dasein's ownmost possibility of what Heidegger calls authentic existence. Heidegger perhaps comes closest to the ontologically circular logic involved in his concept of death *as possibility* in the following passage:

Being-toward-death is the anticipation of a potentiality-of-being of *that* being whose kind of being is anticipation itself. In the anticipatory revealing of this potentiality- of-being, Dasein discloses itself to itself with regard to its most extreme possibility. But to project oneself upon one's ownmost potentiality of being means to be able to understand oneself in the being [Sein] of the being [Seienden] thus revealed: to exist. Anticipation shows itself as the possibility of understanding one's *ownmost* and extreme potentiality-of-being, that is, as the possibility of *authentic existence*. (BT 252)

How does the authentic existence *before* death resolve the aporia we referred to? That is, how is it related to the possible wholeness of Dasein? Heidegger offers the answer in this very important remark:

Death is a possibility of being that Dasein always has to take upon itself. With Death, Dasein stands before itself in its *ownmost* potentiality-of-being. In this possibility, Dasein is concerned about its being-in-the world absolutely [schlechthin]. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. (BT 241)

By taking upon death as its possibility, Dasein stands before its ownmost potentiality. But, what is ownmost turns out to be, paradoxically, nothing other than Dasein's possibility of absolute loss of the ability to be *there*, the possibility of its no longer being Dasein. Death, Heidegger concludes, is the possibility of the impossibility of Dasein. In being-toward-death there is thus a coincidence of being and non-being. Non-being enters the mode of being-in of Dasein.

However, in order to complete the phenomenological exposition of the possible wholeness of Dasein existential analytic needs *existentiell* attestation. It is in resoluteness that Heidegger finds the *existentiell* attestation. "The eminent, authentic disclosedness attested in Dasein itself by its conscience—the *reticent projecting oneself upon one's ownmost being-guilty which is ready for anxiety* – we call *resoluteness* [*Entschlossenheit*]" (BT 284). What resoluteness, as an eminent mode of the disclosedness of Dasein, discloses is, equiprimordially, the whole of being-in-the-world – world, being-in, and the self. "Resoluteness brings the self right into its being together with things at hand, actually taking care of them, and pushes it toward concerned being-with with the others" (BT 285). What Dasein resolves upon in resoluteness is prefigured in Dasein's existential structure of "potentiality-of-being in the mode of heedful concern" (BT 286). Thus, the existential project of Dasein's potentiality-for-being-an-authentic-whole and the *existentiell* attestation of this same phenomenon in resoluteness are the same. Heidegger's analysis would disclose the anticipatory resoluteness, in authentic-being-a-whole, as the *originary experience* of temporality. It is the originary temporality that makes possible the anticipatory resoluteness, and Dasein experiences the originary temporality in resoluteness.

It is tempting to read in being-toward-death a certain dialectical idea of (re)appropriation of death and otherness in Dasein's "*freedom toward death*" (BT 255). In being-toward-death Dasein authentically assumes and thus repeats what it already knows. Being-toward-death is a scene of resolute repetition. This has led Emmanuel Levinas to argue that death

in Heidegger is a supreme lucidity, and hence a supreme virility.¹⁹ Given Heidegger's dominant rhetoric of authentic Dasein's heroic, even tragic, assumption of death and finitude, this reading seems largely justified. In the authentic resolution, says Heidegger, Dasein assumes its already certain possibility of death. In holding death for true Dasein maintains itself and endures in death, which may apparently join Heidegger's Dasein to Hegel's Subject. However, such emphasis on "jargon of authenticity" and heroic assertion, even if justified by the text, may lose sight of the crucial Heideggerian problematic of ontic-ontological difference and the modal character of authenticity/inauthenticity and resoluteness/irresoluteness.²⁰ I would like to suggest that being-toward-death *can* be read as otherwise than the autarchic solitude of Dasein. The point I wish to make is that there is a gesture toward passivity and alterity (otherness) in Heidegger's conception of being-toward-death, which renders problematic the conception of autarchic solitude of Dasein.

Being-toward-death as anticipation discloses the proper and the extreme possibility of Dasein. Dasein's proper possibility is Dasein's finitude that Dasein has to assume or take over. Finitude is a '*relation*' of *passivity*. There is an essential passivity in Dasein's thrown possibility, which permeates its project character throughout. Heidegger, thus, not only distinguishes project from thematization but refuses to attribute to it any intended content. In projecting, project throws possibility *before* itself as possibility. Possibility *as* possibility is thus radically futural, as *always coming*, and is in itself passive. Also, project, let us recall, is always already *attuned* and is never separate from being in mood. Passivity and a certain threatening exteriority already belong to the being in mood of Dasein.

¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and The Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press), 70.

²⁰ In "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," Derrida criticizes Levinas for losing sight of the ontological *difference* in the latter's criticism of Heidegger's primacy of being over existent as philosophy of power. The following passage is worth quoting in our context:

"Being is but the *Being-of* this existent, and does not exist outside it as a foreign power, or as a hostile or neutral impersonal element. ... The thought of Being (of the existent) is radically foreign to the search for a principle, or even a root (although certain images lead us to believe this, occasionally), or for a "tree of knowledge": it is, as we have seen, beyond theory, and is not the first word of theory. It is even beyond all hierarchies. If every "philosophy," every "metaphysics," has always sought to determine the first existent, the excellent and truly existent existent, then the thought of the Being of the existent is not this metaphysics or first philosophy. It is not even ontology, if ontology is another name for first philosophy." Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 136–137.

Dasein thus already finds itself in a finding which generally comes not really from seeking itself but from fleeing (BT 132).

There is a radical outside, a “nowhere,” that *Angst* reveals. The threatening nowhere disrupts the totality of relevance discovered within the world of things at hand and is “what is absolutely unhopd for and not to be perdured – what estranges” (BT 181). But one can argue that the passivity is foreclosed in the hermeneutic circularity of being-in-the-world. True, what *Angst* is anxious about is the *being*-in-the-world itself. The outside-itself that is disclosed in *Angst* belongs to the being-in of Dasein. In *Angst*, Heidegger writes, “Being-in enters the existential “mode” of *not-being-at-home* [*Un-zuhause*]. The talk about “uncanniness” [*Unheimlichkeit*] means nothing other than this” (BT 183). It is also true that the structure of the already being-ahead-of-itself, in Heidegger’s argument, concerns the whole of the constitution of Dasein and characterizes the being-in-the-world. Heidegger formulates being-ahead-of-itself as the unitary structure of “*being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world*” (BT 185). Does it mean that the shock of alterity of *Angst* that reveals possibility as possibility is neutralized? What it means, instead, is that the being-in-the-world is itself outside itself, that the being-in is *ec-static*. It also indicates that the being-in-the-world, as primordially a whole, is ontic-ontological *difference* itself.

In paragraph 53 (“Existential Project of an Authentic Being-toward-Death”), Heidegger offers the most rigorous interpretation of the existential structure of Dasein’s being-toward-death. Let us reread Heidegger’s important statements in this section. Death is Dasein’s *ownmost* and *nonrelational possibility*. In being-toward-death Dasein comports itself to this possibility as possibility. By emphasizing possibility as possibility Heidegger distinguishes being-toward-death from any project of actualization. Death as possibility, in Heidegger’s phenomenological exposition, should be understood as distinct from any reality or actuality. We may also recall that it is Heidegger’s argument that in death, unlike ripening of fruit, Dasein is *not* fulfilled. Death, so to speak, *unfinishes* the possibility of Dasein, which may indicate that the passage between Dasein and death remains *yet to be crossed*, that the lonely hour never finally arrives. But Heidegger would question the very terms of the problem. The lonely hour of death, Heidegger would say, *already* comes before the ‘arrival.’ Dasein *is* the passage and *is* the crossing. Yet, I want to maintain the crucial point that in the annihilation of Dasein’s all possibilities in Dasein’s proper possibility death withdraws from being and presence. Dasein’s relation to death remains a relation to the entirely other.

In order to drive home the point that being-toward-death is distinct from anything real and that death is *not* Dasein's fulfillment Heidegger remarks that "[t]he nearest nearness of being-toward-death as possibility is as far removed as possible from anything real" (BT 251). The impending nearness of death does not destroy the distance. The nearness of death is also its absolute distancing. Death, Heidegger concludes, should be understood, "*as the possibility of the impossibility of existence [Existenz] in general*" (BT 251). In death there is thus what John Sallis admirably calls a coincidence (without conjunction) of being and non-being, of Dasein's *ownmost* and *othermost*.²¹ As Sallis writes, "One would want, then, to say that death, precisely in being ownmost, is the absolutely other – even though one could not but then withdraw the saying, leaving only its trace. At least insofar as absolute must be thought as absolution *of otherness*. Death would be still more absolute: absolution *from presence*."²² Heidegger's account of being-toward-death does not neutralize the alterity but grants it as belonging to Dasein's ownmost being.

If I may follow Sallis's suggestion, there is in being-toward-death a movement of absolution of 'what' or 'who' has *already* withdrawn or absolved, a movement of what we may call a radical heteronomy (pace Heidegger). Being-toward-death, according to Heidegger, is a *possibility* of repetition. More precisely, in my reading, being-toward-death is a *possibility* of repetition of an 'originary' repetition or absolution. In this possibility of repetition there is thus a gesture beyond the solitary assumption of death and heroic self-assertion. Instead, an implicit displacement or change of terrain leads to the possibility of what we may call an ethical relation to other's death, which is, strictly speaking, non-cotemporaneous with Dasein's death. As the death of the other is anterior to witnessing, this possibility of the ethical repetition remains radically unthematizable. By this we do not deny the hermeneutics of repetition but only point to its *other* possibility.

Being-toward-death is structured as trace – the trace of the absolving of the other, if I may use a Levinasian term anachronistically. As we have seen, Sallis, when he refers to the absolute otherness of death, also articulates the absoluteness as the trace. The trace of an other time, the passivity of a past presupposed, so to speak, by the death scene makes the identity of Dasein and time ambiguous and indicates, as we shall see shortly, that a hetero temporality is 'internal' to Dasein. The point that being-toward-death exhibits the possibility of the ethical repetition is attested by Heidegger's discussion of conscience as a call and of discourse.

²¹ Sallis, *Echoes*, 130.

²² Sallis, *Echoes*, 133.

The idea of what I call ethical repetition is implicit in Heidegger's remark that being toward its own most possibility "lets Dasein understand that the most extreme possibility of existence is imminent, that of giving itself up" (BT 252–53). Giving itself up, on Dasein's part, is its irreducible *being-with* the (absolving) other. There is a double movement operant here. The possibility of giving itself up is responsive to the passivity and the alterity of death. Death, as possibility, individualizes Dasein, but only, as Heidegger crucially remarks, "*in order to make Dasein as being-with understand the potentialities-of-being of the others*" (BT 253, emphasis added).

The ethical repetition plays a significant part in Heidegger's discussion of *conscience as a call*, more precisely, in his discussion of *who* is called or summoned, and *who* calls. *Conscience* is a phenomenon of Dasein, and the ontological analysis of conscience is distinct from any psychological description and classification of experience. As a phenomenon of Dasein, the 'fact' of conscience cannot be derived from inductive, empirical proof (BT 249). The analysis of conscience reveals it as a *call* which is a mode of *discourse* (BT 249–251). To call as discourse belong not only the possibility of calling or summoning but also a possibility of *listening*. Heidegger's suggestion is that they belong together originally. Dasein's being lost in the public interpretations of its own possibilities is existentially possible because Dasein as understanding being-with can *listen* to others. How can the failure to hear "its own self" be stopped and another kind of hearing be possible? Another possibility must be given by Dasein itself. "The possibility of such a breach lies in being summoned without any mediation. ... *That which, by calling in this way, gives us to understand, is conscience [Gewissen]*" (BT 261). Heidegger distinguishes the call as a mode of discourse from any image or representation, "like the Kantian representation of conscience as a court of justice" (BT 261). The "voice" of the call is silent and unrepresentable, is that "which can factually never be found." "In the tendency toward disclosure of the call lies the factor of a jolt, of an abrupt arousal. The call calls from afar to afar. It reaches him who wants to be brought back" (BT 261). The jolt or the shock of hearing the call *immediately* introduces a distance in the being-in of Dasein. And conscience is a response to that distance. If the call comes from Dasein and yet, as Heidegger most ambiguously says, from afar, then that distance must belong to Dasein. In the call (and the response to the call) Dasein dwells in the differential and opening line of Dasein and its other.

Listening has priority in Heidegger's conception of the call as discourse. In the breach and abrupt arousal (of being-toward-death) there takes

place a double movement of repetition. There is, in the call, an ambiguous overlapping and repetition/reversal (with displacement) of “voice” and listening. The silent “voice” of the call, as it were, *repeats* the prior listening to the call, the listening that was covered over by the noise of idle chatter of the everyday. Listening cannot be reduced to the factuality of biological organ. “Sensuous listening with the ears is a thrown mode of being affected” (BT 261). Sensibility, ontologically conceived, points to the factual outside-itself structure and the finitude of the being-in of Dasein. Listening, thus, is a *relation* to outside. The “voice” of the call confirms this relation. The “voice” of the call, as it were, *retrieves* the uncanny silence of the attuned listening. The silent “voice” of the call is the *re-petition* of the passivity of listening.

This overlapping makes Heidegger’s response to the question *who* calls ambiguous. “*Dasein calls itself in conscience*” (BT 264). And yet the call is essentially involuntary. “It’ calls, against our expectations and even against our will. On the other hand, the call without doubt does not come from someone else who is with me in the world. The call comes *from* me, and yet *over* me” (BT 265). “It calls,” coming from *and* beyond Dasein, opens up the radical non-contemporaneousness in the being-in of Dasein in that the caller is not Dasein as objectively present entity nor is it someone who is with Dasein in the world. In the call, there is, as it were, a reversal and a repetition-with-displacement of intentionality from “subject” to “object.” There is vigilance and wakefulness in the object-thing which is non-contemporaneous *with* Dasein. “It calls” that reaches Dasein “*in the ground of its uncanniness*” discloses, in repeating, the originary co-incidence, in Dasein’s being-in, of non-being and being. “It calls,” in its reversal of intentionality, reveals that Dasein is *othermost* when it is *ownmost*. In its solitary, nonrelational, repetition Dasein is no longer solitary. Is Heidegger implicitly suggesting that it is not Dasein *alone*, not even primarily, but the Other who stops the inauthentic listening and makes Dasein ‘capable’ to listen and supports Dasein to stand before its proper possibility?

Being-toward-death, in our reading, is a possibility of ethical repetition on the part of Dasein. Reading being-toward-death as the possibility of ethical repetition would, however, render problematic Heidegger’s insistence on the autonomy and the solitude of authentic Dasein. On the contrary, Heidegger’s phenomenological description of being-toward-death reveals the (non-contemporaneous) co-originality of Dasein’s dying and death of others which the original absolving of death indicates. There is, thus, an essential failure in this scene of repetition, if repetition or retrieval

is conceived as Dasein's autarchic assumption of certainty of death. It is this essential failure, as distinct from any ontic privation, that keeps possibility higher than actuality.

Being-toward-death, as double repetition, I submit, reveals the (temporal) line of alterity (coming toward *as* absolving) interior to Dasein, which it cannot cross over, and which also marks the limit of ontology. The line or the limit that Dasein *cannot* cross over is the line or the limit that is already crossed.²³ The line is marked by an 'original' crossing, older than the past that Dasein's memory can recover. This 'original' (*uncrossed*) line opens the scene of death, so to speak. However, the always already absolving of death that first marks the line is not alien to Dasein. Dasein *is* this double crossing.

Let me turn to Heidegger's discussion of 'Temporality as the ontological meaning of care' in paragraph 65 of Division II of *Being and Time*. The discussion is not only preparatory to Heidegger's conception of historical repetition, but is itself a repetition of the existential analytic, leading to the ontology of repetition. Thus, the method and the content of analysis converge, which is the core formula of *Being and Time*.²⁴ Heidegger prepares the hermeneutic basis of the discussion by asking the two tier question: what is meaning (*sinn*) and what is being asked in the question of meaning? The question is of course ontological rather than categorial or epistemological. Already in Division I Heidegger raises the question of the meaning of being and seeks the answer in the projective being of Dasein. It is a hermeneutic circle: the meaning of being lies in the being of Dasein which already presupposes being in general. In raising the question again Heidegger reasserts the identity: "The meaning of being of Dasein is not something different from it, unattached and "outside" of it, rather it is self-understanding Dasein itself" (BT 310). Since time will be determined as the meaning of being of Dasein the identity or the sameness of time and Dasein are re-confirmed. But the structure of the sameness appears to be much more complicated.

In hermeneutic terms, as Heidegger suggests, there is a distinction between being of being and the meaning of that being. The distinction, by

²³ Martin Heidegger, "On the Question of Being," trans. William McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, 291–322.

²⁴ For an illuminating discussion of the relation of Dasein's temporality and its being as repetition, and also for the relation between Kierkegaardian "repetition" and Heideggerian "retrieval," see Chapters 1 and 3 of John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

implication, refers to two levels of projection. In his analysis of understanding and interpretation Heidegger defines meaning as “that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself. ... *Meaning ... is the upon which of the project in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something*” (BT 146–147). Thus, there are, implicitly, two levels of projection: primary and secondary. “Strictly speaking, meaning signifies the upon which of the primary project of the understanding of being. ... But these projects hide in themselves an upon-which from which, so to speak, the understanding of being nourishes itself” (BT 310). Thus an interpretive distinction must be drawn between the primary project of an understanding of being that “gives” meaning and that upon- which the projection is made, albeit preontologically. The “upon-which” of projection makes possible the projection, that is to say, makes possible the possibility itself. There are thus, implicitly, three elements of the hermeneutic projection: being, the projection of the being upon its being, and the upon-which of that projection. The crucial move from the primary project to the second level, suggests Heidegger, leads hermeneutics “beyond being,” and thus beyond ontology.²⁵ The beyond being is temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), or more precisely, futural temporality.

It is from the future that Dasein returns to itself. The future, as a *coming toward*, is what “gives” time in the first place. “This letting-come-toward-itself of the eminent possibility that it endures is the primordial phenomenon of the *future*” (BT 311). The future, Heidegger reminds us, is not a modified now, a *not yet* actualized present, “but the coming in which Dasein comes toward itself in its ownmost potentiality-of-being” (BT 311). The future is *not* alien to Dasein, which will then make it merely ontic, but is ‘related’ to Dasein, in anticipation, as its authentic “*having been*” (the past in the existential sense). That which Dasein has already been in each instance, its having-been-ness, belongs concomitantly to its future. “This having-been-ness, understood primarily, precisely does not mean that the Dasein no longer in fact is; just the contrary, the Dasein is precisely in fact what it *was*.”²⁶ This entails that the past, in the sense of having-been-ness, belongs to Dasein’s existence. The present, in the existential sense, according to Heidegger, is not the same as presence or as extantness. Heidegger interprets the present as comporting with beings that are at hand. The futural having been is not present, rather, as a process, it “releases the present from itself.” (BT 311) This structural co-belonging of

²⁵ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems*, 282.

²⁶ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems*, 265.

the future and the having been is, according to Heidegger, what constitutes (in the phenomenological sense of the term) *original temporality*. According to Heidegger, "This unified phenomenon of the future that makes present in the process of having-been is what we call *temporality*" (BT 311).

Temporality is already a complex phenomenon. As projected, Dasein futurally comes *back* to 'itself' and, as factual thrown being, Dasein carries the past with it as having been. The already complex character of temporality is what Heidegger calls "*ekstatikon par excellence*" (BT 314). "*Temporality is the primordial, "outside of itself" in and for itself*" (BT 314). Heidegger calls future, past and present the three *ecstates* of temporality. The concept of an ecstatic temporal unity of "toward," (future) "back to" (having-been-ness) and "together with" (present) is the decisive contribution of *Being and Time* to ontological hermeneutics. Let me reflect further on the nature and implication of the outside-itself structure of temporality.

Immediately before introducing the central idea of temporality as *ekstatikon*, Heidegger makes the crucial remark that "Temporality 'is' not a being [*Seiendes*] at all. It is not, but rather *temporalizes* itself" (BT 314). How will we interpret this statement which complicates further the identity of Dasein and time? Temporality's *not a being* should suggest an originary co-belonging of being and what Heidegger calls beyond being. The structural co-belonging is not identity, but is itself difference or alterity which is "older" than being and non-being. The 'mediating' difference or alterity is 'what' is beyond being and is temporality itself. The quotation marks the bind that language cannot escape. We cannot avoid saying, Heidegger writes, that temporality "is" the meaning of care; and yet it cannot be said that it *is*, since temporality is not being (BT 314). The bind is the necessary failure of language and itself points to the aporia of ontic-ontological difference expressed, in this case, in language.

Although Heidegger's central thesis, in *Being and Time*, is that, as ecstatic mode, time is *one*, the structure of temporality as beyond being *and* already being should confirm the thesis that a more originary hetero temporality is implicitly at work in the text of *Being and Time*. The irreducible hetero temporality is disjunctive of the identity of being of Dasein and time. It is even refractory to ontology. We should also take seriously Heidegger's repeated insistence that the future has *priority* in the ecstatic unity of time. It is from the primordial future that temporality temporalizes. However, as ecstatic, the future fills in the significance of care which is *being-toward-death*. But, the *priority* of the future in the ecstatic unity, the *already to-come ness* of the future, indicates its already absolving or

withdrawal. The prior withdrawal of the future, withdrawal that belongs to its *priority*, referring to an immemorial past, is what makes the future originally closed and time finite. This finitude of the future opens the possibility of being-open, or being-toward-death. Finitude is the relation of a (non-relational) passivity of the future and the irrevocable past, which introduces a disjuncture in the self-identity of the present.

The point can be made that Heidegger's concept of anticipation disavows the "unmotivated" finitude that constitutes the organizing centre of *Being and Time*. But the tragic language of anticipatory resoluteness, of the free taking of the past, it can be rightly argued, nonetheless thinks and gathers finitude within the horizon of awaiting and destiny. The authentic temporality, as a unified phenomenon, is a gathering. But is it not from Heidegger that we have learnt the strategy of intimate deconstruction? My reading seeks to focus on the movement of potential destructing in *Being and Time* that inaugurates what John Caputo calls "radical hermeneutics."

In my discussion of the death scene, I have referred to the trace structure of being-toward death. In our reading, the ecstatic temporality also has the structure of trace that is beyond being. The trace refers to the alterity of the future, the singularity and the irrevocability of the past that is refractory to any idea of temporality as gathering. Repetition thus seeks to repeat the singular and the unrepeatable. The passivity and the singularity of future (gone-ness) is what opens the *possibility* of repetition *as* the finite possibility.

Heidegger retrieves the question of repetition in the context of his discussion of the historicity of Dasein. The over all discussion of the historicity falls outside of the scope of this chapter. Let me refer to certain aspects of Heidegger's concept of repetition as they pertain to our theme.

The discussion of historical repetition takes place in paragraph 74 of *Being and Time*, entitled, "The Essential Constitution of Historicity." Heidegger grounds the question of historicity in Dasein's originary temporal structure of care which is disclosed, existentially, in Dasein's anticipatory resoluteness. The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself discloses its authentic factual possibilities as what Heidegger calls "heritage," which that resoluteness takes over as thrown. There is a circular movement in Dasein's anticipatory resoluteness. In projecting upon its ownmost possibilities Dasein comes back to itself. "Only the anticipation of death drives every random and "preliminary" possibility out. Only being free *for* death gives Dasein its absolute goal and pushes existence into its finitude" (BT 365) This is the meaning of what Heidegger calls *handing itself down* to itself (BT 365–366). According to Heidegger, this

handing itself down to itself, which he also terms “fate,” is essentially futural. Here is Heidegger’s argument:

*Only a being that is essentially futural in its being so that it can let itself be thrown back upon its factual there, free for its death and shattering itself on it, that is, only a being that, as futural, is equiprimordially **having-been**, can hand down to itself its inherited possibility, takes over its own thrownness and be **in the Moment** for “its time.” (BT 366)*

This is why, according to Heidegger, Dasein’s authentic resoluteness has to be historical. Historicality of Dasein, in this context, means that Dasein as authentic being-with is already communal. Now, Heidegger’s concept of anticipatory resoluteness which takes over and temporally repeats its thrownness, and which founds the concept of self-heritage and fate, seems to finally reappropriate future’s passivity, which is indicated, as we read, in Heidegger’s discussion of originary temporality. The finitude and alterity that temporality designates is gathered under the fate of being and collective destiny. And yet, Heidegger’s concept of repetition contains deconstructive potential. For it is Heidegger’s crucial point that repetition does not actualize what was already an actual possibility. Repetition repeats the *other possibility*. Here is Heidegger’s argument:

The handing down of a possibility that has been in repeating it, however, does not, however, disclose the Dasein that has been there in order to actualize it again. The repetition of what is possible neither brings back “what is past,” nor does it bind the “present” back to what is “outdated.” Arising from a resolute self-projection, repetition is not convinced by “something past,” in just letting it come back as what was once real. Rather, repetition *responds* to the possibility of existence that has-been-there. (BT 367)

Repetition does not repeat the past but *produces* what is historical for the first time. However, in opposition to the *climate* of Heideggerian history as gathering of being I repeat the central argument I have made in this section. Which is that Dasein’s repetition, or more precisely, its ethical repetition, is its singular passage through or re-*tracing* of the trace of the other (future). I shall return to the trace structure of Dasein, its essential non-coincidence-with-self in the next section on the “subject.”

Being- with for the Other

It is part of my argument that by locating transcendence in the subject, that is, as ontologically conceived, Dasein, Heidegger breaks with the modern ontology that, in Descartes especially, thinks of the subject on

the model of substance. Precisely by the same move Heidegger stands against the thinking of the subject as subjectum (*hypokeimenon*). And since transcendence is the basis of Dasein's intentional comportments with others and things extant transcendence belongs to the structure of care as being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-(factual) being-in-the-world. Transcendence, thus, is the ground of selfhood, which is essentially non-solipsistic and non-solitary. This should offer a preliminary clue to Heidegger's discussion of the mode of being of Dasein's *being-with* in chapter IV of part I of *Being and Time*.

Heidegger's crucial point with regard to the 'identity' of Dasein, let us recall, is that it should not be conceived as any whatness, but always as *who* Dasein *is*. The formal and ontological definition of Dasein is that Dasein is a being I myself am, its being is in each case mine (cf. paragraph 9). This determination contains an ontic indication that the I is always this being, and not others. However, the existential analytic shows that "*if the "I" is an essential determination of Dasein, then it must be interpreted existentially*" (BT 114). The "*substance*" of human being, Heidegger writes, is not the spirit as the synthesis of body and soul, but *existence* (BT 114). Thus, the answer to the question of the *who* must be prepared by the explication of the structure of being-in-the-world. Dasein's encounter with the *others* in the world cannot be conceived in the same sense as Dasein's encounter with objectively present entities in the world. The encounter must be understood *existentially*, not categorially. "The innerworldly being-in-itself of others is *Dasein-with* [*MitDasein*]" (BT 116). The other is encountered in his *Mitdasein* in the world. The fact that *Mitdasein* essentially constitutes being-in of Dasein does not mean that Dasein is not alone, rather that others are also present with it. "Being-with existentially determines Dasein even when an other is not factically present and perceived. The being-alone of Dasein, too, is being-with in the world" (BT 117). Heidegger's point is that being-with not only characterizes Dasein, but *Mitdasein* characterizes the Dasein of others in that it is freed for a being-with by the world of that being-with (BT 118). Does that mean that others are there as only part, or, better, as a double of Dasein's projective being-in?

But we have not yet fully considered the question of the *who* of Dasein in its everydayness. The question is crucial not only to ascertain what Heidegger calls the authentic mode of being of Dasein, but also, as we shall soon see, to ascertain the authentic being of other *as* other. The question points to the *modal* relation of authenticity and inauthenticity. The fact that the "who" of Dasein is always answered as "I am" does not clarify phenomenologically the *ontological* structure of what is thus given. It is

always possible, Heidegger cautions us, that Dasein most loudly says that it is I, when it is not this being. However, “not I” signifies a definite mode of being of the “I” itself, albeit having lost itself. In its everyday existence, the self of Dasein is lost in the “they” (*das Man*). The “they” is the anonymous “who” of Dasein in its everyday existence. Heidegger characterizes Dasein’s existence in the world of the they as one of subservience to indefinite, neuter, “others”:

In utilizing public transportation, in the use of information services such as the newspaper, every other is like the rest. This being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Dasein completely into the kind of being of “the others” in such a way that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the they unfolds its true dictatorship. ... The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness.... In its being, the they is essentially concerned with averageness. Thus, the they maintains itself factually in the averageness of what belongs to it, what it does and does not consider valid, and what it grants or denies success. (BT 123)

Against this subjection and domination, Heidegger affirms not only the autonomy and the solitude of authentic Dasein, but also the essential otherness of the other.²⁷ As I have attempted to argue in my reading of being-toward-death, Heidegger’s conception of “solitary” Dasein is otherwise than solipsism and egocity. Rather, in the authentic Dasein there is an originary co-belonging of Dasein and others. How does Heidegger articulate in his conception of *Mitdasein* this relation of being-with others positively without reducing the other to Dasein’s projective self-understanding? Heidegger distinguishes Dasein’s being-with from the “kind of being of useful things at hand.” Rather, this being is a matter of *concern* (BT 118). The everyday and average being-with-one-another, which Heidegger calls deficient mode of being-with, “tend to mislead the ontological interpretation into initially interpreting this being as the pure objective presence of several subjects” (BT 118). Heidegger then distinguishes two extreme possibilities with regard to the positive mode of care. “It can, so to speak, take the other’s “care” away from him and put itself in his place in taking care, it can *leap in* for him” (BT 118). This concern can easily turn into a relation of dependence and domination (of other). “In contrast to this, there is the possibility of a concern which does not so much leap in for the other as

²⁷ For a deconstructive reflection on the concept of the *Mitdasein*, see Chapter 1 of Christopher Fynsk, *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*, (Ithaka and London: Cornell University Press, 1986).

leap ahead of him in his existentiell potentiality-of-being, not in order to take “care” away from him, but rather to authentically to give it back as such” (BT 119). Heidegger’s significant suggestion is that a being-with which arises from one’s doing the same thing as someone else “enters the mode of distance and reserve” (BT 119). If being-with is conceived as a relation *of* distance, which is, however, otherwise than the inauthentic mode of being-with, then the authentic being-with is not something opposite of inauthentic being-with (domination and subjugation), but the *extreme* modification of the latter.

Being-with-other, for Heidegger, is an *autonomous* relation and cannot be reduced to Dasein’s projective *self-relation*. Being-with, moreover, is not, initially, one of *empathy* either. Heidegger’s argument is succinct, and yet immensely suggestive:

To be sure, being-toward-others is ontologically different from being toward objectively present things. The “other” being itself has the kind of being of Dasein. Thus, in being with and toward others, there is a relation of being from Dasein to Dasein. But, one would like to say, this relation is after all already constitutive for one’s own Dasein, which has an understanding of its own being and is thus related to Dasein. The relation of being to others then becomes a projection of one’s own being to oneself “into an other.” The other is a duplicate [Dublette] of the self.

But it is easy to see that this seemingly obvious deliberation has little ground to stand on. The presupposition which this argument makes use of – that the being of Dasein toward itself is a being toward another—is incorrect. As long as the presupposition has not been demonstrated clearly in its legitimacy, it remains puzzling how the relation of Dasein to itself should thus be disclosed to the other as other. (BT 121)

What is puzzling is how Dasein’s being toward itself discloses Dasein’s being toward other as other. The passage cited above makes it clear that being-with involves a relation of alterity that cannot be reduced to Dasein’s self-relation. However, for Heidegger, being-with is an autonomous relation since the relation of alterity, which defines the other, belongs primordially to Dasein’s singular relation to itself. Further, being-with implies a relation of asymmetry between Dasein and the other. Which means that the relation of Dasein to the other cannot be the same as the other’s relation to Dasein. How is this relation of alterity and asymmetry positively articulated as constituting Dasein’s selfhood or “subjectivity?”

Let us recall, the formal definition of Dasein is sought in the phenomenon of mineness (*jemeinigkeit*). Ontologically, thus, Dasein’s essence (*essentia*) must be conceived in terms of its being (*existential*). Two characteristics – mineness and existence – should be thought of as inseparable.

Heidegger's further point is that Dasein is not a substantive entity, or present-at hand, but a *possible way* for it to *be*. Existence or a possible way of being *is* selfhood and constitutes the 'subjectivity' of Dasein. Self is not a pregiven concept. Rather, self should be grasped as existence. Mineness is not the immutable property of Dasein. Rather, each time it is *to be*. The factual possibility of Dasein's "to be" explains the fact that selfhood or mineness is constituted as care. In taking care or being concerned about one's own being Dasein is responsible for its possible "to be," which is articulated, in *Being and Time*, as the phenomenon of the call of conscience. In the phenomenon of the call is attested Dasein's being-with the other as constitutive of Dasein's ownmost being or selfhood. Dasein listens to the call when it is lost in the inauthentic being-with the they. When lost in the they, the call brings back Dasein to its ownmost being and singularizes Dasein as responsible being-with.

In our discussion of the question who calls we have seen that in the call there take place a reversal of intentionality, intentionality of the object-thing, a radical modification of Dasein's inauthentic they-self, and, in that sense, a repetition-with-displacement of inauthenticity. In *Angst*, in authentic being-toward-death, in being radically ungrounded, Dasein listens to its own call. Yet the call comes from me and over me, and, as it were, from afar. According to Heidegger, the caller of the call can be *identified* neither as 'who' nor as 'what.' The caller is *without* identity. In being thrown upon its naked uncanniness, Dasein is, at the same time, the caller and is summoned in its bare "that it is." In this sense, in listening to the "voice" of the call Dasein is *singularly* constituted as self, which is self *as* other. Heidegger then describes the caller as a nameless "it". Anonymity does not signify the nameless power of the they since in the "it calls" the domination of the they is radically modified *and* displaced. Nor is it right to describe the nameless as amounting to enrootedness of being. Rather in the "it calls" being "lets be" the relation of de-distancing and spaces the difference itself. Being-*with* designates the relation of distance and difference. One can rightly argue that Dasein as self is thus singularly obligated to the other in being obligated to being. As Heidegger would write, later, in his "Letter on Humanism": "But if the human being is to find his way once again into the nearness of being he must first learn to exist in the nameless."²⁸ And in a language akin to his description of discourse, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger states that the authentic listening is reticent:

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism'," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks*, 243.

"Before he speaks the human being must first let himself be claimed by being, taking the risk that under this claim he will seldom have much to say."²⁹ This claim of being is nothing but the petition of the other, which is not a claim of an alien power but belongs, co-originarily, to the being of Dasein. We may say that being-with as ethical relation is primordial to the ontology of Dasein. This ethical relation has a priority in the ontic-ontological being-with, which is articulated by Heidegger as "being-with for the other" in language (BT 158).

Discourse is the pre-eminent mode of Dasein's being-with. Discourse, as saying and speaking, along with attunement and understanding, is fundamental to Dasein's mode of being-there or being-in-the-world. "The attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world *expresses itself as discourse*." (BT 156) Instead of being thought as an instrument of communication, discourse as language is thought as existential. Language, as saying, is constitutive of Dasein whose existing is a certain thrown projection. "For language," Heidegger adds in a footnote, "thrownness is essential" (BT 156). This call is nonsubjective as the caller is not the subject, nor is "it" the thematized other *of* the subject. The nonsubjective call nonetheless singularizes Dasein as the obligated subject of hearkening.

In discourse, says Heidegger, "world" is shared. Language as sharing, rather than simply conveying experiences, for example, opinions or wishes, belongs to the thrown mode of *Mitdasein* (BT 157). The sharing of the world, in language, is not an option for Dasein, which it chooses subjectively. This sharing founds the world as signification, as being-shared. In discourse primacy shifts from the subject to the other, which is articulated as a shift in primacy from speaking to hearing. Let us hear Heidegger:

Listening to... is the existential being-open of Dasein as being-with for the other. Listening even constitutes the primary and authentic openness of Dasein for its ownmost possibility of being, as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it. (BT 158)

Hearing is primary in the *relation* of intelligible discourse. This is not just a matter of physiological capacity. Both hearing and speaking presuppose not only the givenness of the being-in-the-world as significance, but indicate, Heidegger would suggest, the primacy of the other, marking the radical outside, in the discoursing, and, thus, a finitude and passivity of Dasein. Speaking is *already* "shared" in being-with (BT 158).

²⁹ Heidegger, "Letter," 243.

In discoursing, “subject” is *already* outside-itself in the sense that Dasein is already out, with and for the other. Language, as saying, not only presupposes the eminent presence of the other, but, in a certain sense, otherness already belongs to the constitution of the “subject.” Discourse attests this non-self-identity of the speaker. Language, as call (of the other), if we may read strongly, indicates the heteronomy implicit in the singular autonomy of Dasein.

In *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger extends this thought of language as the “letting-be” of the other, language as an event of interruption in the identity of Dasein. These later writings on language present what Gerald Bruns calls a certain refusal of philosophy, of hermeneutics.³⁰ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger perhaps shrinks back from the thought of the radical outside, as he thinks of discourse within the totality of intelligibility of being-in-the world. Remarkable, in this context, is Heidegger’s “repression” of what he calls “pure noise” as opposed to intelligible speech (BT 158). However, the radical germ of his thinking of language as interruptive event is already evident in *Being and Time*.

In my reading of being-toward-death and temporality of Dasein I have argued that the absolving of the other, marking a radical passivity of future-past, singularizes Dasein as the obligated subject. Dasein’s ethical repetition of the original absolving of the other is Dasein’s response to the singular call of the other. Language allows Dasein’s ethical repetition. In language, Dasein *emerges* as the subject of obligation.

³⁰ Gerald Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 102–108.

CHAPTER TWO

BEYOND BEING: EVENT, TIME AND SUBJECT IN LEVINAS

Ontological hermeneutics: being, presence and essence

In his essay “No Identity,” Levinas points to the significant convergence between the human science’s famous proclamation of the death of Man or the end of the subject and Heidegger’s influential philosophical critique of transcendental subjectivity. If in the case of the human science’s critique of subjectivity there is nostalgia for logical formalism and mathematical structures in the understanding of man, in Heidegger, according to Levinas, man becomes sayers, herald and messenger of being. Man’s inwardness would be a symptom of the “forgetting of being.” “*The inward world is contested by Heidegger, as by the sciences of man.*”¹ I shall refer to this essay later in the context of the discussion of Levinas’s thinking of the subject. What is of interest for us in this essay, at this early stage, is that it offers us a certain entry point to Levinas’s rethinking of the structure of Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics, for, as Levinas suggests in this essay, Heidegger’s radicalization of Husserl’s anti-psychologism, and Heidegger’s own anti-humanism becomes meaningful only within the firm and, as it were, unalterable horizon of being and essence. “*Being requires man as a native land or a ground requires its autochthon.*”²

Like Heidegger, Levinas sees Western thought as primarily ontology. However, ontology or theory as such, Levinas argues in his first masterwork *Totality and Infinity*, is identified with the freedom of knowing being encountering nothing which could limit it.³ Theory aims at the known being through a third, neutral, term, which itself is not a being. The third term may appear as “*Being distinguished from the existent*” (TI 42). “*Being, which is without the density of existents, is the light in which existents become intelligible*” (TI 42). For both Husserl and

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, “No Identity,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 144.

² Levinas, “No Identity,” 144.

³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 42.

All further references to the text will be parenthetically cited as TI, followed by the page number.

Heidegger, phenomenology “is the promotion of the idea of *horizon*, which for it plays a role equivalent to that of the *concept* in classical idealism; an existent arises upon a ground that extends beyond it, as an individual arises from a concept” (TI 44–45). The meaning of the existent rests on its relationship with *being in general*, on comprehension, on ontology. “Heidegger posits in advance this ground of being as the horizon on which every existent arises, as though the horizon, and the idea of limit it includes and which is proper to vision, were the ultimate structure of relationship.” (TI 68)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in locating transcendence in the “subject,” that is, Dasein, Heidegger stands against the modern subjectivism and radicalizes the anti-psychologism in Husserl. Levinas, for sure, takes note of this crucial point. But Levinas would argue that this locating of transcendence in Dasein’s being-in-the-world nonetheless situates transcendence in a more solid ground of immanence of being and presence. The ‘event’ of angst that introduces a breach in the totality of signification is, through Dasein’s “authentic assumption” of death and finitude, reabsorbed in the hermeneutic totality of the being-in-the-world. As Levinas would say, transcendence, in Heidegger, remains factitious. Although in my reading of *Being and Time* I have attempted to show that there is, in the text, a gesture toward radical passivity and ethical repetition which remain non-thematizable and thus, in a certain sense, *otherwise* than the hermeneutic project of retrieval, Heidegger, as I have noted, perhaps disavows this move beyond hermeneutics through his concepts of project, anticipation, authentic assumption etc.

In a series of essays collected in *Of God Who Comes to Mind* Levinas reflects on ontological hermeneutics with exceptional rigor. In this section I shall briefly discuss the main motifs of these reflections. I shall also refer, in this context, to Levinas’s remarks in *Otherwise Than Being*. I shall revisit the same motifs in the last section of the chapter, in the context of Levinas’s discussion of the said and the saying in *Otherwise Than Being*.

In the tradition of philosophy, according to Levinas, the question of meaning or intelligibility has always coincided with the manifestation of being; meaning remains the meaning and affair of being, which moves, in the form of intelligibility, toward clarity, and thence becomes intentional thematization in an experience.⁴ All the potentialities of

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God who comes to mind*, trans. Bettina Berg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 57.

Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as OG, followed by the page number.

experience await thematization. As intentional thematization and as manifestation of being, philosophy, Levinas suggests, remains an intrigue of knowledge (OG 58).

Levinas takes the Husserlian phenomenology of consciousness beyond its traditional formulations. Levinas interprets consciousness as the ontological event whereby being commands its modes of *being given*. “[B]eing orders the forms of knowledge that apprehend it, and ... an essential necessity attaches being to its modes of appearing to consciousness” (OG 100). Levinas writes in *Otherwise Than Being*:

Subjectivity qua consciousness can thus be interpreted as the articulation of an ontological event, as one of the mysterious ways in which its “act of being” is deployed. Being a theme, being intelligible or open, possessing oneself, the moment of *having in being* – all that is articulated in the movement of essence, losing itself and finding itself out of an ideal principle, ... in its thematic exposition, being thus carries on its affair of being.⁵

Consciousness is thus an ontological event that manifests the energy of being or what Levinas calls the *essance* of being. Levinas writes *essance* with an “a” to give a name to the verbal aspect of the word “being.” Further, “[t]he *essance* of being would be equivalent to *ex-position*” (OG 101). This linking of essence to *ex-position* is a crucial aspect of Levinas’s critique of ontology. According to Levinas, the idealist philosophy or philosophical tradition in general has never questioned the actuality of being which “signifies a position on a solid ground, the most solid of grounds, the earth” (OG 112). The *essance* of being, understood as *ex-position*, thus refers to a consolidation on an unshakable terrain, the earth beneath the vault of the sky, to the positivity of here and now, to the positivity of presence (OG 101). By the positivity of presence Levinas means “resting of the identical.” “It states an activity that effects no change, neither of quality nor place, but in which, precisely, is fulfilled the very identification of identity, the nonrestlessness of identity, as the act of its rest” (OG 112). The affirmation and assertion of *essance* presupposes this fundamental rest. By the same token, *exposition* refers being to exhibition and to phenomenon. “From position or *essance* to phenomenon, one is not describing a simple degradation but an emphasis” (OG 101). “The idealism of modern thought” which emphasizes the activity of synthesizing thought against the resting of being, finally affirms this stability, this priority of the world. “The

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 99. All further references to the text will be parenthetically cited as OTB, followed by the page number.

negation that claims to deny being is still, in its opposition, a position on a terrain upon which it is based" (OG 113). Hegel's logic, Levinas argues, would assert the identity of the identical and the nonidentical (OG 113). In Heidegger, Dasein's being in the world remains a comprehension of being (OG 114).

According to Levinas, representation is the privileged mode of presence. Presence returns to itself in the re-presentation and fills itself or identifies itself (OG 102). Representation is the very *life* of presence. The life of presence is also a duration of presence, a duration as presence. In duration any lapse of time is rediscovered and reconstituted through reminiscence or historiography. Consciousness, as reminiscence, as representation, remains in the service of being and presence. "*Time of Consciousness lending itself to representation is the synchrony that is stronger than diachrony*" (OG 102). Hence, Levinas's insistence that representation has a fundamental role within phenomenological intentionality. Through representation, every experience, however passive it be, is transformed into a "constitution of being," as though the *given* were derived from oneself. Being, thus, carries in itself the possibility of idealism.

In chapter II of *Otherwise Than Being* Levinas reflects on the relation between the *temporal* essence of being and the phenomenological representation or thematization. In ontology, Levinas argues, the question of truth remains subordinate to the exposition of being. The question of *who*, of subjectivity, remains correlative with being. Subjectivity would be a moment of the being-totality in which every exception of inwardness is recuperated (OTB 28). However, truth, as the manifestation of being, also requires a separation in being, a detour of time, a detour that time itself is. Levinas's term for this is "the getting out of phase of the instant" (OTB 28). This primary separation in being, this getting out of phase, makes possible a recuperation in which nothing is lost. The detour of time belongs, co-originally, to the very primacy of re-presentation. The detour of time is thus not a pure distancing, but a re-presentation, that is, a distancing in which truth *is* already or *still is* (OTB 29). "For a representation is a recommencement of the present which in its "first time" is for the second time; it is a retention and protention, between forgetting and expecting, between memory and project" (OTB 29). The temporalization of time, "the diastasis of the identical," belongs to being's essence. What essence thus designates is not any nameable content, a thing or event, but is the "modification" without alteration or transition, the mobility of the immobile, the multiplication of the identical (OTB 30).

The ontological “participation” in the being-totality, where the meanings of the terms of relations are reduced to their place in an a priori system, is what Levinas refers to as “allergy.” This allergy is expressed in a “multiplicity of allergic egoisms” and in what Levinas describes as “war” (OTB 4). Etymologically, as Levinas suggests, being or essence – the Latin *esse* – is rooted in *interesse* or interest. “War is the deed or the drama of the essence’s interest. No entity can await its hour. They all clash, despite the difference of the regions to which the terms in conflict may belong. Essence thus is the extreme synchronism of war” (OTB 4). Even rational peace, which suspends the immediate clash of beings, remains calculation, mediation and politics. It does not resist interest (OTB 4).

“The visage of being that shows itself in war,” Levinas writes in the Preface of *Totality and Infinity*, “is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates western philosophy” (TI 21). The meaning of the individual (invisible outside of totality) is derived from the totality (TI 22). What can disrupt the totality is what Levinas does not hesitate to call the “eschatology of messianic peace,” which he distinguishes from teleology (TI 22). In teleology, the unicity of each present is sacrificed to a future, a finality appealed to in order to bring forth the objective meaning of the totality (TI 22). Levinas includes teleology within his broader notion of historiography. Totalization, according to Levinas, is accomplished only in history. “The time of universal history remains as the ontological ground in which particular existences are lost, are computed, and in which at least their essences are recapitulated” (TI 55). In the totalizing time of the historiographer, who is a survivor, interiority is a “nothing,” nothing but pure thought (TI 55). The eschatological, on the contrary, is an event that institutes a relation *beyond the totality*, a *relation* that Levinas would describe as ethical. Eschatology represents transcendence with regard to being-totality and essence. It measures the idea of *infinity*. The eschatological notion of judgment, says Levinas, implies that beings have identity “before” eternity, while there is still time. This notion of time’s not *yet* makes it possible for existents to *speak* “rather than lending their lips to an anonymous utterance of history” (TI 23). The subjectivity that Levinas defends as beyond essence belongs not to ontology but to eschatology, not to the order of phenomenon but to what Levinas calls enigma. I shall return to this notion of the subjectivity beyond being-totality, the subjectivity belonging to the ‘order’ of the enigma, in the final section of this chapter.

Original Pluralism

The ethical relation, according to Levinas, is a non-allergic relation in the sense that the terms of the relation – the I and the other – are not correlative; they exist in what Levinas calls an original “pluralism of being [which] is not produced as a multiplicity of a constellation spread out before a possible gaze, for thus it would be already totalized, joined into an entity” (TI 305).⁶ The ethical relation is an event. It is an event in the sense that it is transcendent to our “ontological forestructures.” As an event the ethical relation with the other calls into question the exercise of the same and my egoist spontaneity. But in order for such an event to happen the terms of the relation must remain radically separate, must absolve from the relation while remaining in the relation. Otherwise the terms would remain (ontologically) reciprocal or even dialectically correlated and thus neutral.

In the section entitled “The Breach of Totality” in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explains the radically separate and asymmetrical character of the terms that the metaphysical relation requires. The absolute exteriority of the metaphysical term is attested by the transcendence of the other, which Levinas, borrowing from Jean Wahl, calls “transascendence” (TI 35). Transcendence as transascendence not only designates distance and exteriority but also height. But the distance and the height characteristic of the transcendent are, unlike all distances, the *way of existing* of the exterior being. Because of this distance that constitutes the content of the other “the metaphysician and the other can not be *totalized*” (TI 35). The absolute exteriority of the other implies that the metaphysician and the other do not form “a simple correlation which would be reversible” (TI 35). In a relation that is reversible the terms would be united “in a system visible from the outside” (TI 35). The transcendence would then be reabsorbed in the system. The radical separation between the I and the other precisely implies that it is impossible to take a position, a neutral position, outside of the *relation* between the I and the other. In the neutral perspective the other becomes a theme or an object and is thus reduced to the Same.

Now, according to Levinas, the radical exteriority of the other is possible only if the I remains absolutely at the point of departure, only if the

⁶ For an insightful discussion of the original pluralism of being that is presupposed by the ethical relation see chapter 2 of Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

I remains the same not relatively but absolutely (TI 36). The I is the origin of the very phenomenon of identity; it is identification in the strong sense. The identity of the I is not due to any unalterable quality or property. "The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is ... the primordial work of identification" (TI 36). The I is an ipseity. The identification of the I should not be thought as a monotonous tautology: "I am I." Nor is the identification reducible to the A is A form. But rather, as Levinas suggests, the identification is produced as a sojourn in the world, as identifying oneself against the "other" of the world by existing here at home with oneself (TI 37). The outside of me is *for me*. The "at home" in the world is a site where *I can* (TI 37). The ipseity of the I is not a dialectical antithesis of the other, but is the concreteness of egoism. The radically separate character of the transcendent other and the I means that He and I do not form a number. Nor can the I and the other be linked by the unity of concepts. The I and the other constitute a relation from which they absolve. What Levinas calls *face to face* is precisely such a relation.

In order to affirm the non-ontological character of the alterity and infinity of the other Levinas distinguishes transcendence from negativity. Levinas's point is that thinking the other's alterity as the mode of negation of the same would reduce the other to being dialectically correlated with the same. A metaphysical desire which "desires beyond everything that can simply complete it," and which is thus distinct from need, does not coincide with negativity. It is in this context, in the section entitled "Transcendence Is Not Negativity" in *Totality and Infinity*, that Levinas introduces the Cartesian "idea of the infinite."

The idea of infinity is the idea of perfect which, Levinas suggests, cannot be measured by the negation of imperfections. Perfection exceeds conception, and designates distance. It is a passage to the absolutely other. "The perfection designated by this passage to the limit does not remain on the common plane of the *yes* and the *no* at which negativity operates; on the contrary, the idea of infinity designates a height and a nobility, a transcendence.... The idea of the perfect and of infinity is not reducible to the negation of the imperfect; negativity is incapable of transcendence" (TI 41).

The transcendence of the other in the metaphysical relation precisely means that the same and the other remain in a relation without being united in a Whole. This situation is attested by the Cartesian primacy of the idea of infinity in which the "I think" maintains a *relation* with the

Infinite it can nowise contain (TI 48). “[T]he idea of infinity is exceptional in that its *ideatum* surpasses its idea” (TI 49). To repeat, the absolution of the terms from the relation belongs to the relation itself. Similarly, the distance between *ideatum* and idea constitutes the content of the *ideatum* itself. Thus the Cartesian notion of the idea of the infinite designates a relation with the infinity that maintains its total exteriority and is thus irreducible to ontological correlation.

Presence before a face is the concretization of the idea of infinity. “The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face” (TI 50). The face of the Other is otherwise than “a theme under my gaze” and overflows its plastic image (TI 50–51). Face, rather than being a disclosure of impersonal Neuter, *expresses* itself. As an expression in itself face as relation exceeds the ontological thematization. “To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it” (TI 51). Face institutes the ethical relation beyond ontology.

Now, to repeat, it is Levinas’s point that the metaphysical relation requires the separation of the same from the other. But the separation cannot amount to an opposition to the other, to an anti-thetical relation with the other. In that case, the terms of the relation would remain ontologically united. “An absolute transcendence has to be produced as non-integrateable” (TI 53). For the metaphysical relation to ‘take place,’ the I (as the same) must remain absolutely at the point of departure. The task then is to show how the existence of the same remains irreducible to ontology and to systematic unity. Part of Section I and the bulk of Section II of *Totality and Infinity* are devoted to explicating phenomenologically the ontologically irreducible existence of the same. I shall briefly consider the main part of the argument.

Levinas describes the existence of the same – “above being” and irreducible to knower-known correlation – as “psychism” or “inner life.” “The psychism constitutes an *event* in being; ... The original role of the psychism does not, in fact, consist in only *reflecting* being, it is already *a way of being* ... resistance to the totality... The dimension of the psychism opens under the force of the resistance a being opposes to its totalization; it is the feat of radical separation” (TI 54). Although Levinas uses the word “being,” the expression should be taken to imply the pre-ontological existence of separated beings, rather than the prior ontological unity.⁷ The resistance to totalization means that the separated being has its “own

⁷ For this suggestion see Dudiak, *The Intrigue*, 80.

destiny to itself" without the time of universal history being the measure of its reality (TI 55).

The interiority of the existent is positively accomplished in enjoyment of itself which Levinas describes as "living from..." "We live from "good soup," air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep etc. ... These are not objects of representation. We live from them" (TI 110). Distinguishing his concept of enjoyment from "the utilitarian schematism" (of Heidegger) Levinas suggest that things we live from are not just tools and implements; they are "objects of enjoyment, presenting themselves to 'taste,' already adorned, embellished" (TI 110). Living from... is distinct from a system of finality and dependence with regard to the other. It delineates the independence of enjoyment and of its happiness (TI 110). It is true that in living from... we depend on the contents. But that dependence is also what Levinas calls nourishment. "Nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other... becomes, in enjoyment, my energy, my strength, me. All enjoyment is in this sense alimentation" (TI 111). In enjoyment "there is a relation with an object and at the same time a relation with this relation which also nourishes and fills life" (TI 111). In living from... "the act of living these contents is ipso facto a content of life" (TI 111). Dependence on the contents is *lived* as independence.

At this point, distinguishing his phenomenology of enjoyment from Heidegger's existential ontology, Levinas claims that living from... as enjoyment and nourishment implies that the life we live is never a bare life and is never "an ontological *Sorge* for this life" (TI 112). Life as happiness indicates that our relations with the contents of life are not my being but more dear than my being (TI 112). Relations with the contents of life do not take place on the plane of *pure being*. Living from... as enjoyment "does not express (as Heidegger would have it) the mode of my implantation – my *disposition* – in being, the tonus of my bearing, but already the exceeding of being" (TI 113). "It is as though the existent could aspire to a new triumph above and beyond the plenitude of being" (TI 113).

Nourishment indicates dependence on the contents, which is need. But, Levinas argues, need should be distinguished from a "simple lack" pace Plato and also from "pure passivity" pace Kant (TI 114). Except in a "disorganized society," need does not enslave us; need is our enjoyment. If need indicates our dependence on the world it is a happy dependence.

It is Levinas's crucial point that the I exists "without being the individuation of a concept" and outside of the opposition between the particular

and the general. The I, as the unicity and the singular, is the mode in which the breach of totality is concretely accomplished. "The upsurge of the self beginning in enjoyment" does not belong to the order of ontology but to what Levinas calls axiology. I becomes the subject not by assuming being but by "the interiorization of enjoyment," which is precisely "above being" (TI 119). The critical presence of the Other will call in question the egoism but, as Levinas would suggest, it will not destroy the unicity and solitude of the subject. Rather, in the ethical *relation* (as in Levinas's description) the unicity of the subject will be repeated *and* dis-placed. The subject will be invested with ethical freedom. But, more importantly, it is Levinas's central point, articulated in a remarkably difficult manner in *Otherwise Than Being*, that absolution and infinity of the Other is the condition (or the uncondition) of the unicity of subject, which again would be strictly distinguished from a transcendental or quasi-transcendental concept or principle.

As I have noted earlier, the relation of enjoyment with the contents is distinct from a utilitarian and instrumental relation. Now, according to Levinas, the contents of enjoyment are not constituted and represented objects at all, which would then organize them into a system. Things in enjoyment take form in what Levinas calls the "medium [milieu]" (TI 130). The medium has its own density which contains without being able to be contained. Levinas refers to this non-possessable medium as elemental (TI 131). We do not approach the element from outside. "The relation adequate to its essence discovers it precisely as a medium: one is steeped in it; I am always within the element" (TI 131). Being immersed and bathing are the adequate relation with the element as though we were in the bowels of being (TI 132). In that sense, Levinas contends, the indetermination of the element precedes the distinction between the finite and the infinite. The situation of being inside the element does not belong to representation but to what Levinas calls sensibility, which is the mode of enjoyment (TI 135). It is not thought or consciousness but affectivity that characterizes sensibility. In contrast to thought, sensibility is contented in its immediacy and it is suffice unto itself. "Objects *content* me in their finitude, without appearing to me on a ground of infinity" (TI 135).

But, as Levinas contends crucially, in its finitude sensible enjoyment remains in touch with an "other" "inasmuch as a future is announced within the element and menaces it with insecurity" (TI 137). This is the other side of the happy contentment of enjoyment. The insecurity that troubles the sensible being, that "brings into the interiority of enjoyment a frontier," does not come from the infinity of the Other, but somehow

from the nothingness of the future. This qualification seems to be crucial in the unfolding of Levinas's argument. The insecurity of the future that Levinas describes as a "shock" of heteronomy in the course of descent into interiority would not in itself open the relation with the other, but "would furnish the *occasion* for a resumption of relations with exteriority" (TI 149). I shall come to this point later in the context of Levinas's discussion of sensibility as vulnerability in *Otherwise Than Being*.

In this section I have attempted to trace the asymmetry of the separation (transcendence) of the other with regard to the selfsameness of the I and the separation of the selfsame I from its own totalization. The relation remains asymmetric in that the movement of separation is not on the same plane as the movement of transcendence (TI 148). Now, if Levinas thinks of both the separation of the self-same and the transcendence of the other outside of the totalizing conception of time he must develop another structure of temporality that is non-totalizing and is adequate to the singularity of both the I and the other. It will be my argument, in the sections that follow, that it is by thinking through *event* that Levinas offers a non-totalizing conception of time. Let me first trace Levinas's expositions of the event of the separation of the subject and its distinctive temporality in his early writings.

The Event of Separation and the Subject

In *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, Levinas takes off from Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics of the relation of being and beings. The ontological distinction between being and beings is, however, phenomenologically interpreted and deepened as the separation in being itself. What is Levinas's justification for this phenomenological move? In order to think of the radical separation of the subject Levinas must account for the *emergence* of the subject (or the ego). The emergence therefore has to be thought as an event in being itself. Levinas thinks of this event (and drama) of separation as *hypostasis*. Thinking the separation of the subject as an event in being is also Levinas's effort to think the materiality and substantivity of the subject. In this section, I focus on Levinas's two early works rather than on *Totality and Infinity* because in these two early texts the eventness of the emergence of the subject is considered with exceptional phenomenological rigor, and the relationship with Heidegger is properly laid out.

The innovation of Levinas's phenomenology in his early writings consists in separating a realm of pure existing without any existent to master

it. Levinas finds the clue for this in Heidegger's expression *Geworfenheit* which, according to Levinas, should be understood as "the fact-of-being-thrown-in" ... existence."⁸ The term suggests "as if the existent appeared only in an existence that precedes it ... and the existent that finds itself thrown there could never become master of existence" (TO 45). Heidegger, according to Levinas, disavows such potential by his conception *Jemeinigkeit* which expresses the fact that existing is always possessed by someone (TO 45).

How does Levinas approach the realm of pure existing? In a move of phenomenological *reduction* reminiscent of Husserl's phenomenological hypothesis of the annihilation of the world in *Ideas I*, Levinas exhorts us to "imagine all things, beings and persons, returning to nothingness" (TO 46). What remains after this imaginary destruction of everything is not the pure consciousness, as it is in Husserl, but what Levinas calls "the fact that there is [*il y a*]" (TO 46). The *There is* is not a substantive "something" nor is it the indeterminateness of the subject. It is an anonymous presence, an atmospheric density, the "field of forces" of existence, a plenitude of void. We read in *Existence and Existents*: "This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable "consummation" of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*."⁹ What Levinas is trying to describe by the *there is* is, to couch it in Heideggerian language, the neutrality of being in general. The neutrality of the *there is* may also remind the reader of Heidegger's *es gibt*. But while Heidegger's term invests *there is* with generosity the basic mood of Levinas's *there is* is horror.

Levinas offers a brilliant phenomenological illustration of the *there is* in the experience of the night, in the experience of insomnia. "When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence. ... There is no longer *this* or *that*; there is not "something." But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence" (EE 58). There is in this nocturnal space no longer any perspective. There

⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and The Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 45.

All further references to the text will be parenthetically cited as TO, followed by the page number.

⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 57.

All further references to the text will be parenthetically cited as EE, followed by the page number.

is only “a swarming of points” (EE 59). In the experience of insomnia there is a vigilance without end, a consciousness of being riveted, of the impossibility to withdraw. “It is always the same present or the same past that endures. ... Here time begins nowhere, nothing moves away or shades off” (TO 48). Levinas thus characterizes the *there is* by a vigilance without recourse to sleep as into a private domain.

Like the night of insomnia, *there is* is the absence of all self, “a *without-self*” (TO 49). In this sense, the experience of *there is* is that of horror, as Levinas understands it. “In horror,” writes Levinas, “a subject is stripped of his subjectivity, of his power to have private existence. The subject is depersonalized. ... It is a participation in the *there is*” (EE 61). The experience of the *there is* is that of the interminability of existence, of the impossibility of death (EE 61). Suicide appears as the final refuge against the absurdity of the *there is*, a final mastery over existence, which, Levinas reminds us, is the constant fact of tragedy. Levinas particularly refers to Shakespeare’s tragedies. Yet, as Levinas interprets *Hamlet*, the “not to be,” for Hamlet, remains an impossibility, and it is impossible to master the absurd, even by suicide. This makes *Hamlet* “the tragedy of tragedy” (TO 50).

The emergence of consciousness introduces a rupture in the anonymous vigilance of the *there is*. This emergence of consciousness is what Levinas terms hypostasis. “It refers to a situation where an existent is put in touch with its existing” (TO 51). This emergence is an “inversion” at the heart of the impersonal *there is*. Hypostasis signifies the very constitution of the mastery and the freedom of the existent. Hypostasis is the primary event of the identification of the subject, which by departing from and returning to the self constitutes itself as a monad.

In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas articulates the event of hypostasis in both spatial and temporal terms. Hypostasis refers to a position which offers consciousness a base, a condition. Interestingly enough, Levinas appeals to the Cartesian *cogito* whose profundity, according to him, consists in discovering thought as substance, that is, something that is posited (EE 68). The base, “the here” of thought, is attested to by the possibility of sleeping. What does sleeping consist in? “The summoning of sleep occurs in the act of lying down. To lie down is precisely to limit existence to a place, to position” (EE 69). Consciousness supposes this rest, this position. Place and position refer to an “object” that, before confronting the subject of knowing, supports the subject. By leaning on the base the subject posits itself as a subject (EE 70).

In contrast to Heidegger, Levinas suggests that while the *Da* of Dasein already implies the world, the *here* of position precedes every understanding, every horizon. "It is the very fact that consciousness is an origin, that it starts from itself, that it is an *existent*" (EE 71). A place, before being the referential setting of the Heideggerian world, is a base, and in that sense, is an *event* of position. "It is the irruption in anonymous being of localization itself" (EE 71).

Body, for Levinas, is the articulation of this event, or, more precisely, is this event itself. This eventness of the body is not taken into account, Levinas suggests, when one insists only on its "internal" experiences. The materiality of the body is my *experience* of materiality. The body is surely more than a chunk of matter. It has the expressive function of being the house of a soul. But the spirituality of the body does not consist in expressing what is inward. "By its position [body] realizes condition necessary for any inwardness" (EE 72). It is characteristic of Rodin's sculptures that the statues, in their positions, have this event-like relation with the base, rather than a relationship with a soul, a knowing, a thought (EE 72).

The temporal analogue of the here and the position, according to Levinas, is the *present*. It should be reiterated that Levinas conceives his notion of the instant and the present against the totalizing conception of time which includes not only the metaphysical tradition but also Heidegger's ecstatic temporality that sacrifices the substantiality and materiality of the subject in favour of abstraction (EE 97). Through his notion of the present (of hypostasis) Levinas seeks to recover the very materiality of the subject. I should note that we are not yet at the level of Levinas's articulation of the ethical subject. We are tracing the hypostasis as the condition of the possibility of the egoist subject.

The present is the way the instant comes to be. The present begins with itself, refers only to itself and thus refracts the future. The evanescence of the present, Levinas suggests, is the very mode of the emergence of the subject out of anonymity. It is so because the production of an instant of time cannot emerge from an infinite series. The instant shows an indifference to the series (EE 73). The present is the situation in which there is not only being in general, but a being, a subject. "Its evanescence is the ransom paid for its subjectivity, that is, for the transmutation, within the pure event of being, of an event into a substantive – a hypostasis" (EE 73). Because of the evanescence, the present is the very effectuation of a subject.

"Philosophy throughout its history," says Levinas, "has understood the instant by starting with time" (EE 74). The instant gets its meaning from

the dialectic of time; it does not have dialectic of its own (EE 74). In both *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents* Levinas includes Heidegger within the tradition that subordinates the present to the “dialectic” of time. For, when Levinas writes, in *Time and the Other*, that “[t]he material character of the present does not result from the fact that past weighs upon it or that it is anxious about its future” (TO 56), he is clearly referring to Heidegger’s conception of a finite Dasein. On the contrary, for Levinas, an instant qua beginning and birth is a relationship *sui generis* (EE 76).

The relationship of the instant with itself seems paradoxical. Positing hypostasis, Levinas suggests crucially, is still not to introduce time into being (TO 52). What comes to be does not preexist the beginning and yet what does not exist must through its beginning give birth to itself, without coming from anywhere (EE 76). The relationship is accomplished in a sort of rebound movement. “A beginning does not start out of the instant that precedes the beginning; its point of departure is contained in its point of arrival, like a rebound movement. It is out of this withdrawal in the very heart of the present that the present is effected, and an instant taken up” (EE 76).

This double movement of the instant crucially implies that the hypostatized subject has the dual character of having, through hypostasis, mastery over existence and a being burdened with the weight of existence. This is the ambiguity of the “materiality” of the subject as a free being that is already responsible. The duality or even paradox of the hypostatized subject lies in the fact that the subject cannot detach itself from itself. Its identity is its enchainment to itself (TO 55). “This is its great paradox: a free being is already no longer free, because it is responsible to itself” (TO 55). Referring to Maurice Blanchot’s novel *Aminadab* Levinas writes that the relationship with itself is the relationship with a double that the ego [*le moi*] is with precisely because it is me [*moi*] (TO 56). “My being doubles with a having; I am encumbered by myself” (TO 56). Levinas sees in this fact of *doubling* the essential moment of the tragic. The tragedy of solitude does not consist in the privation of the other, does not lie in the misfortunes that happen to us because our existence is finite. On the contrary, the tragedy lies in the infinity of existence that is consumed in an instant, the fatality in which its freedom is congealed (EE 78).

The “I,” Levinas thus argues, should not be conceived primarily as “a spiritual center from which radiates consciousness,” but has to be grasped in its “amphibological mutation from an event into an entity” (EE 79–80). Hypostasis signifies a suspension of the *there is*. A subject emerges on the ground of the *there is* and assumes its mastery over anonymous existence.

But this event of emergence to freedom remains, for the existent, an infinite task. Because at each moment the *there is* returns, and the ego, in its participation in the *there is*, remains enchained to its existence. Such is the paradox of freedom and solitude of the subject. We have seen this obdurate return of the *there is* marking the frontier of enjoyment as its nocturnal insecurity. This duality in the existence of the subject, which results perpetually from the event of separation in being, is attested to by certain moments in human life “where the adherence of existence to an existent appears like a cleaving” (EE 22). In *Existence and Existents*, Levinas offers a fascinating phenomenology of affective and prereflective moods like fatigue and indolence in which this event becomes visible.

Fatigue and indolence, according to Levinas, do not result from any particular deprivation of life; fatigue concerns the very existence itself. In fatigue and indolence there is a constant reminder of a commitment to exist in that they consist essentially in the refusal to exist (EE 25). Fatigue does not result from a lack of decision and deliberation. “It occurs after the intention has been formulated” (EE 25). Fatigue is the very refusal to begin after one has begun an action. Fatigue accompanies effort like its double.

In effort and labor Levinas finds an irrevocable commitment and a condemnation. Unlike magic, which is indifferent to duration, human labor and effort follow the work being done step by step. Its condemnation consists in taking up an instant as an inevitable present (EE 33). “Effort is an effort of the present that lags behind the present” (EE 31). The fatigue of effort makes visible the time lag of the present. “Fatigue is this time-lag. Here the taking up of existence in the instant becomes directly visible” (EE 35). If the time-lag of fatigue creates the interval in which the event of the present as hypostasis can take place then it makes visible the duality of the event of hypostasis: the effectuation, in the present instant, of the subject *and* the reverting back to the *there is*. Fatigue shows this inescapable ‘paradox’ of the subject.

In both the early works, Levinas reiterates the claim that positing hypostasis as a present is still not to introduce time into being and that it is impossible to speak of time in a solitary subject. Which implies that time arises with the Other. *Existence and Existents* concludes with a section entitled “On the way to time.” In that section Levinas questions in what sense does hope aim at time. What does hope consist in? Levinas’s answer: hope is hope only for the present when the present suffering is irreparable. Hope is hope only when it is no longer permissible. Hope for the present, Levinas further suggests, points beyond “the conception of time which fits our life in the world, and which we shall ... call the time

of economy" (EE 90), and thus points towards a new modality of event *and* time. The time of hope has to redeem the very instant and the present of pain. "Does not the essence of time," asks Levinas, "consist in responding to that exigency of salvation" (EE 91–92)? The new modality of event and time, Levinas says, is the Messianic (EE 91). The new modality is what we have already hinted at as the relation with the transcendent Other. In his later writings, especially in *Otherwise Than Being*, there would be a crucial shift in Levinas's thinking of subjectivity. Subjectivity would be inseparable from the ethical call by which the other commands the subject. The subject would be the subject of interpellation. The very materiality of the subject would be discovered as *already* exposed to the other.

The Event of the Other, Trace, Time

Death, Face, and the Time of Re-petition

Let me begin again with Levinas's engagement with Heidegger. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas offers an analysis of 'being toward death' that, according to him, remains in sharp contrast with the Heideggerian analyses of the phenomenon. According to Levinas, being toward death, in Heidegger's authentic assumption, "is a supreme lucidity and hence a supreme virility" (TO 70). Being toward death is Dasein's resolute assumption of death as possibility, which makes possible activity and freedom. "Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom" (TO 70). In contrast, for Levinas, the relation with death is a relation with something radically unknown in that the relationship cannot take place in the light. Death signifies passivity and radical alterity. Death marks the limit of the subject's virility, a virility made possible by the hypostasis at the heart of the *there is*. It is not just that against death our power proves to be inadequate. "What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain moment we are no longer *able to be able*" (TO 74). What this indicates, according to Levinas, is that "[a]n event happens to us without our having absolutely anything *a priori*," without our being able to have the least project" (TO 74). This approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something absolutely other, something whose very existence is made of alterity (TO 74). From the fact of alterity that is indicated in death Levinas draws the conclusion that existence is pluralist (TO 75). The other [*l'Autre*] that is announced in death does not possess the existing as the subject does; its hold is mysterious. It is radically unknowable (TO 75). But this unknowability indicates that "the other is in no way another myself,

participating with me in a common existence" (TO 75). Instead, the alterity of death, Levinas points out, indicates a radical exteriority of the future. The relationship with the other is the relationship with the future which remains exterior to any anticipatory project of the subject.

Yet the future opened by the alterity of death is not yet time. The future becomes the element of time, Levinas suggests, only when it enters into the relationship with the present. For this to happen one needs a new event that institutes a new modality beyond one's being toward death. This new modality is established by what Levinas calls face-to-face with the Other. Face-to face or an intersubjective relationship (we will see that the expression "intersubjective" is inadequate to describe the exceptional relation) is the condition of time.

In the chapter entitled "The Ethical Relation and Time" in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas reflects on the 'theme' of death, event *and* time with exceptional rigor. As we shall see, the discussion of time *against* death implicitly raises the possibility of what we may call ethical repetition. Levinas begins the discussion with a phenomenology of violence in war. War or the antagonism of forces presupposes a pluralism of wills that refuse totality and community. Antagonistic wills affirm themselves by transcending the totality. "It is a relation between beings exterior to totality" (TI 223). Nonetheless, the separated adversaries maintain a *relation* outside of totality. How is the relation outside of totality possible? It is in response to this question that Levinas crucially advances his notion of finite freedom. As Levinas suggests, for the relation between separated beings to be possible, the multiple terms should remain partially independent and partially in relation (TI 223). But the finitude of freedom does not mean that a being is split into one part endowed with a causality of its own and another part subjected to exterior causes. The notion of finite freedom must be thought without the category of causality. It is the notion of temporal being rather than causality that accounts for the finite freedom. "It is not finite freedom that makes the notion of time intelligible; it is time that gives a meaning to the notion of finite freedom. Time is precisely the fact that the whole existence of the mortal being – exposed to violence – is not being for death, but the 'not yet' which is a way of being against death, a retreat before death in the very midst of its inexorable approach" (TI 224). By the not yet *of* time (time as not yet), Levinas means the adjournment of death by time, a "postponement by virtue of which nothing is definitive yet" (TI 224).

Now, I want to argue that it is the *time of repetition*, the notion of which is implicit in Levinas's argument, that makes possible not only the

adjournment of death and thus finite freedom but also the ethical repetition that institutes a new modality beyond death. Where does the mortal being get *time* to postpone death? Levinas's answer: it is from the infinite dimension, a dimension opened by the face of the Other, that time comes. It is the face of the Other *and* discourse that provoke the murderous will and at the same time transcend violence absolutely. It is the transcendence of the Other that accounts for freedom (TI 225). In what does the moral resistance of the face against death consist? It consists in its absolution. As Levinas writes in his essay 'The Trace of the Other,' a face makes an entry into our world from an absolutely alien sphere, that is, precisely out of absoluteness. And in the midst of its very production a face absolves from its very appearance.¹⁰ Because of its "force" of absolution from the ontological correlation the face is an event. Its absolution (its eventness) is *always-already*. Now, if absolution *already* belongs to the constitution of the event of the Other, that precisely means that the *time* of (the event of) the Other is that of repetition and sheer return. The event 'takes place' already *and* again. Why repetition, why already *and* again? It is because the event of the Other, because absolution belongs to it, is without present, without presence. The event 'takes place' already *and* again in the abyss of the 'present' where no presence has ever taken place. This is why repetition is the temporal mode of the event of the Other. Repetition, in this context, and we want to stress this point, is something contrary to the retrieval of being or essence, which would then subsume the separated wills within the prior ontological totality. Instead, repetition belongs to the *alterity* of the Other and thus resists thematization. The notion of ethical re-petition is implicit in Levinas's argument that the force of the Other is *already* and henceforth moral (TI 225).

The event of re-petition, if we may use the expression to indicate the fact that at each instant what is involved is the singularity of the event, provides *time* for the finite freedom. But, it would be Levinas's crucial point that this time makes *possible* the institution of a new, ethical, modality beyond death. The event of facing is the condition of the possibility of the *displacement* of the egoist will, of a *change of terrain*. It provides time for the will to flow into the essence of desire "whose center of gravitation does not coincide with the I of need, the desire that is for the Other" (TI 236). "The will, already betrayal and alienation of itself but postponing

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," trans. Alphonso Lingis in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 352.

this betrayal, on the way to death but a death ever future, exposed to death but not *immediately*, has time to be for the Other, and thus to recover meaning despite death" (TI 236).

The event of face as event of the Other provides time to *displace* 'being toward death,' whose origin Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity*, sees in murder, into being against the other's death – an inversion, so to speak, of the time of the egoist freedom (against the Other) into the time of what we may call the ethical freedom (for the Other). The displacement thus reveals a plot distinct from being-toward-death. Levinas articulates the new plot as "to-be-for-after-my-death." "To be for a time that would be without me, to be for a time after my time, for a future beyond the celebrated "being-for-death," to-be-for-after-my-death ... is not a banal thought that extrapolates one's own duration; it is passage to the time of the other."¹¹

Face, Language, Trace, Repetition

The Face, as a relation, Levinas suggests, is anterior to comprehension and resists a conceptual grasp. How does a relation anterior to intention come to us? To be sure, the manifestation of the other is first produced, Levinas concedes, in conformity with the way normal signification is produced in our everyday world. The other is present in a cultural context and is illuminated by this context. The other receives its signification from its position in the cultural whole. Against this cultural hermeneutics Levinas maintains that the face of the other is *not* an appearance open to thematization but an epiphany. "[T]he epiphany of the other involves a signifyingness of its own, independently of this signification received from the world."¹² The face absolves itself from its cultural mediation. According to Levinas, this absolution means that the other at each instant undoes the form he presents (TI 66). The face is an expression *and* an apparition. "The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated" (TI 66). "His manifestation is a surplus over the inevitable paralysis of manifestation."¹³ Let me again remark that this undoing, at each instant, of the plastic form and cultural manifestation means that the time of the Other is that of repetition and return. Can we say that the time *of* re-petition is the surplus time of the other over the time of the cultural whole? This surplus time then is the time of language and speech.

¹¹ Levinas, "The Trace," 359.

¹² Levinas, "The Trace," 351.

¹³ Levinas, "The Trace," 352.

The manifestation of the face, Levinas says, founds discourse. Manifestation means, Levinas writes quoting Plato's expression, to come to one's own assistance. This way of coming to one's assistance by undoing the form adequate to the Same is the original moment of signification (TI 66). It is perhaps the most important aspect of Levinas's conception of language that he situates the other, not the speaking-subject, at the originary site of language. Language or discourse is *already* a relation with the other. "Signification," Levinas writes, "is not an ideal essence or a relation open to intellectual intuition, thus still analogous to the sensation presented to the eye. It is preeminently the presence of exteriority" (TI 66). "To give meaning to one's presence is an event irreducible to evidence. It does not enter into intuition; it is a presence more direct than visible manifestation, and at the same time a remote presence – that of the other" (TI 66).

Language or the face as language, as presence of exteriority, as a relation of absolution of the other, is irreducible to the subject-object relation, is otherwise than *disclosure* or the bringing to light of visibility. The face as *revelation* is already language or speech. And speaking is something refractory to the category of vision. Vision is the primary category of knowledge and thematization. Vision, Levinas would suggest, appropriates the seen to itself, integrates it within synoptic totalization by endowing it with a signification and, in the last analysis, constitutes it (TI 195). "Speech cuts across vision" (TI 195). It is in conformity with this Levinasian insight that Maurice Blanchot writes in *The Infinite Conversation*: "Speaking is not seeing. Speaking frees thought from the optical imperative that in the Western tradition, for thousands of years, has subjugated our approach to things, and induced us to think under the guaranty of light or under the threat of its absence."¹⁴ Levinas, in his emphasis on the nonvisibility of the other's speech, thus implicitly prioritizes listening in the relation of language, frees listening from linguistic thematization. Heidegger's conception of discourse in *Being and Time*, as we have seen, implies the ethical moment of priority of listening over voice. But Levinas would argue that the listening in Heidegger is still listening to the call of *being* and not of the other. Moreover, Heidegger's conception of being-*with* would view language as a community of the terms of the relationship open to visibility and comprehension.

¹⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 27.

Language is an expression and an event of the other. Language, as the other's undoing of his manifestation, is the event of the repetition of the other. Thinking language as the event of the Other allows us to free language from its subjection to the constitutive freedom of consciousness where "everything comes about from within – even the strangeness of suffering" (TI 204). Signification, whose primordial event is the face to face, thus marks the limit of idealism. As an event discourse deprives me of immanence and self-identity and puts me under the claim of the other. Language as the event of the other is *already* society and obligation. Levinas describes discourse as "the expression of something absolutely foreign, a *pure* 'knowledge' or 'experience,' a *traumatism of astonishment*" (TI 73). The event of the Other is an experience of measureless passivity. The event uproots the I from its dwelling and throws it upon the passivity of past "which has never been, come back again."¹⁵ The expression "traumatism" precisely indicates the alterity and the *asymmetry* of the ethical relation. In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot reflects on the traumatic asymmetry:

In the relation of *myself to the Other*, the Other exceeds my grasp. The Other: the Separate, the Most-high which escapes my power — the powerless, therefore; the stranger, dispossessed. But, in the relation of *Other to me*, everything seems to reverse itself: the distant becomes the close-by, this proximity becomes the obsession that afflicts me, that weighs down upon me, that separates me from myself – as if separation (which measured the transcendence from me to the Other) did its work within me, dis-identifying me, abandoning me to passivity, leaving me without any initiative and bereft of present.¹⁶

And yet, as both Levinas and Blanchot would maintain, though passivity destroys me I am at the same time pressed into a responsibility which exceeds my capacity. The asymmetry of the relation with the Other that Blanchot describes in strict conformity with Levinas indicates a singular experience of heteronomy, which the terms like apparition, trace, diachrony designate. Levinas thus could describe the event of the Other both as experience without shock (TI 197) *and* as trauma.

In his early essay, 'Phenomenon and Enigma,' written in 1957, Levinas calls the event of the other disturbance. Disturbance or disorder is generally taken as a relative idea. Disturbance, the clash of two orders,

¹⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 17.

¹⁶ Blanchot, *The Disaster*, 19.

culminates in a conciliation, in the formation of a new order. The absolute disturbance that Levinas is thinking of represents a plot, a time that is not reducible to order or, as Levinas suggests, to understanding of being. Disturbance that the alterity of the other causes precisely consists in the other's absolution from the order of being. "Disturbance is a movement that does not propose any stable order in conflict or in accord with a given order; it is a movement that already carries away the signification it brought: disturbance disturbs order without troubling it seriously. It enters in so subtle a way that unless we retain it, it has already withdrawn. ... It remains only for him who would like to take it up."¹⁷ The force of disturbance lies in its "enigma" of manifesting itself by withdrawing from manifestation. What is essential about disturbance and its enigma is "the way a meaning that is beyond meaning is inserted in the meaning that remains in an order, the way it advances while retreating. ... The God who spoke said nothing, passed incognito, everything in the light of the phenomena gives lie to him, refutes, represses, persecutes him."¹⁸ Phenomena, Levinas argues, ensure that transcendence be brought back to immanence and synchronized with being-totality. The enigma, the subtle insertion of meaning by way of withdrawing like an undesirable stranger, "unless one harkens to those footsteps that depart," is transcendence itself.¹⁹

The transcendence of the other, which cannot be synchronized with my being-present, cannot be brought back to the simultaneity of the present, refers to "an irreversible, immemorial, unrepresentable past."²⁰ But how to refer to an irreversible past without, by that very reference, immediately bringing it back to simultaneity of the present? "What would be needed," Levinas writes, "would be an indication that would reveal the withdrawal of the indicated, instead of a reference that rejoins it. Such is a trace..."²¹

The face, let me repeat, comes from the *beyond*, which is precisely beyond the "world" and every disclosure. The beyond, thus, is not a symbolic reference to a beyond since symbol brings the symbolized back to the world in which it appears. Nor can the visitation of the face be simply converted into a representation in which the other loses its alterity. The face absolves itself from the representation in which it manifests itself. In

¹⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, "Phenomenon and Enigma," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 66.

¹⁸ Levinas, "Phenomenon," 66.

¹⁹ Levinas, "Phenomenon," 70.

²⁰ Levinas, "Phenomenon," 65.

²¹ Levinas, "Phenomenon," 65.

'The Trace of the Other,' Levinas refers to Sartre's "noteworthy insight" that the other is a pure hole in the world, "but he [Sartre] stops his analysis too soon." The other comes from an absolutely absent. But "[h]is relationship with the absolutely absent from which it comes *does not indicate, does not reveal* this absent; yet this absent has a meaning in a face."²² Signifyingness of the absent that does not *indicate* the absent is the extraordinary signifyingness of trace. The signifyingness of a trace thus must be distinguished from a certain mirror play of absence and presence. A trace, for Levinas, is a sign in a special sense. A trace is a sign without being a correlation between a signified and signification. The relation between signified and signification in a trace is what Levinas ambiguously calls "*unrightness* itself."²³ It places us in a lateral relation, unconvertible in a rightness, referring thus to an irreversible past.²⁴ A trace is a sign that signifies "outside of every intention of signaling and outside of every project ..."²⁵ The signifyingness without the proper signified, the signifyingness that effaces, by "overprinting," that proper correlation which could maintain it in presence and being disturbs the order of signification in an irreparable way. There cannot be thus a proper trace. The effacement of trace belongs to the constitution of the trace, to its very event. "He who left traces in wiping out his traces did not mean to say or do anything by the traces he left.... He has passed absolutely. *To be qua leaving a trace* is to pass, to depart, to absolve oneself."²⁶

It is Levinas's point that if a trace marks the unrightness of signification – but in this sense every sign is a trace – it is because a trace signifies beyond being, an irreversible lapse, a "transcendent diachrony." "*Beyond being is a third person...*"²⁷ What Levinas calls the *illeity* of the third person should not, however, be confused with the neutrality of the third term that Levinas himself criticizes, or with the *it* of things. Later, Levinas would write that the trace of the third lights up as the face of a neighbor (OTB 12). The absolution or the re-petition of the absolution of the face is in the third person. "*He* expresses exactly its inexpressible irreversibility, already escaping every relation as well as every dissimulation ..."²⁸ The enigma of signification comes from the *illeity*. While being designates a community

²² Levinas, "The Trace," 355.

²³ Levinas, "The Trace," 355.

²⁴ Levinas, "The Trace," 355.

²⁵ Levinas, "The Trace," 356–357.

²⁶ Levinas, "The Trace," 357.

²⁷ Levinas, "The Trace," 356.

²⁸ Levinas, "The Trace," 356.

and the contemporaneousness of comprehension, “in the trace of *illeity*, in the enigma the synchronism falls out of tune, the totality is transcended in another time.”²⁹ The *illeity* of the third is the trace of absolute distance in the nearest nearness of the face.

The trace and (the possibility of) re-petition belong to the same movement. In the trace there is a double movement of repetition. The trace is a return, already a *return*, to the finite present and, even before revealing the indicated, a repetition of the ‘original’ withdrawal. Levinas expresses this double movement as spacing, or, if one prefers, as staging, as *mis-en-abim*: “A trace is the insertion of space in time, the point at which the world inclines toward a past and a time. This time is a withdrawal of the other...”³⁰ We can also say that the trace as re-petition is the passageway between the present and what is anterior to the present, the future beyond being. It is a passage in the sense that “[a] trace qua trace does not simply lead to the past, but is the very *passing* toward a past more remote than any past and any future which still are set in my time ...”³¹ In that sense, it will be more proper to say that the trace is a passageway to the anterior past-future *without* any reference to presence that would establish a linear coherence of past, present and future. The trace introduces an abyssal non-coincidence in my present. The trace as re-petition thus reveals a temporal plot that Levinas calls, with extraordinary precision, transcendent diachrony, or anachrony. There is an irreducible *heteronomy* to the event of re-petition, to its anachronic time. The re-petition to which we refer is not the repetition of the same (identity), but, at each instant, of difference *of* the other, which is expressed, beyond the event of the face, in what Levinas describes as the eventness of fecundity.

What Levinas calls, in *Totality and Infinity*, the judgment of God (as opposed to the judgment of history), which judges me *and* confirms me, confirms my very interiority, “which requires all the resources of subjectivity” (TI 246), requires a time that cannot be gathered into a synchronic present, that cannot be correlative with my anticipatory project in the form of memory, that cannot be gathered into an immobile eternity. Such a time, Levinas argues, would be necessarily an infinite time. But the infinite time cannot be thus a continuous time of history or even an infinite line of time (TI 247). The infinity of time, Levinas suggests, depends upon the discontinuity of time – upon an *event* that introduces into time

²⁹ Levinas, “Phenomenon,” 71.

³⁰ Levinas, “The Trace,” 358.

³¹ Levinas, “The Trace,” 358.

a genuine newness that cannot be reduced to any anticipatory project. The infinity of time depends on the encounter with the infinity of the face of the Other that calls me to responsibility. What Levinas calls fecundity makes possible the infinite time through the event of discontinuity.

Fecundity involves repetition, but not of the identical but of absolute difference, a repetition radically distinct from my *project* of retrieval. "My child is a stranger (Isaiah 49), but a stranger who is not only mine, for he *is* me. He is me a stranger to myself" (TI 267). Here, repetition, as fecundity, is also a new time, is an "ever recommencing being," an absolute future. "Both my own and non-mine, a possibility of myself but also a possibility of the other, of the Beloved, my future does not enter into the logical essence of the possible. The relation with such a future, irreducible to the power over possibles, we shall call fecundity" (TI 267). Fecundity thus involves what I have called repetition *of* absolution. Re-petition, embodied in the child, is both an interruption and a renewal. Fecundity, Levinas would suggest, is continuity through the rupture of discontinuity. It denotes my future, but is not a future of the same, "not a history and events that can occur to the residue of identity" (TI 268). It articulates the time of the absolutely Other. Which thus means that "[b]eing is produced as multiple and split into the same and the other; this is its ultimate structure. It is society, and hence it is time. We thus leave the philosophy of Parmenidean being" (TI 269).

In fecundity the I transcends "the world of light" – not to dissolve into anonymity, but to go to the Other. "[T]ranscendence transcends toward him who transcends – that is the true adventure of paternity ... Fecundity engendering fecundity accomplishes goodness" (TI 269). Fecundity accomplishes the Desire which Levinas carefully distinguishes from need and lack. This accomplishment of Desire and goodness is a recommencement of the instant, the triumph of the time of fecundity over mortal ageing (TI 282). This recommencement, says Levinas, is the very work of time (time's infinity) that brings pardon.

From the view point of common time, that is, the linear time of historiography, pardon is a paradox as it works in "retroaction," as it, from the point of view of common time, inverts the natural order of time and reverses time (TI 283). Pardon refers to the very instant of the past. While forgetting disregards the reality of the event forgotten, pardon acts upon the past, somehow repeats and purifies the event (TI 283). Pardon, Levinas says, is constitutive of time itself (TI 283). Time, the new time of the future, is not produced as a succession of instants, indifferent to one another, but "comes to me across an absolute interval whose other shore the Other,

absolutely other – though he be my son – is alone capable of marking, and of connecting with the past” (TI 283). Pardon, the re-petition *of* the Other “across the dead time that separates the father from the son,” rejuvenates from the past the former Desire that animated it (TI 283). A re-petition that marks pardon therefore takes place as “a rupture of continuity, and continuation across this rupture” (TI 284). Re-petition *and* new time – infinite being are produced in *several times* across the death (dead time) that separates the father from the son. “It is not the finitude of being that constitutes the essence of time, as Heidegger thinks, but its infinity” (TI 284). The infinity of time of which Levinas speaks, the infinition that constitutes the “essence” of time, thus requires an *event*, an event of diachrony (several times). This event, however, signifies a certain lapse, an irrecoverable passivity of time.

In our reading pursued thus far, we have thus two senses of event. On the one hand, there is an event of subjectification in the form of hypostasis which is an event of separation in being itself. This event institutes the subject *in position*, whose temporality is that of the instant, the *present*. On the other hand, what I have called the event of the Other ‘takes place’ outside of the present, outside of presence and being, and signifies diachrony and passivity. In Blanchot’s description in *The Writing of the Disaster*: “It is not an advent ... it does not happen. And thus I cannot ever happen upon this thought, except without knowing, without appropriating any knowledge. Or again, is it the advent of what does not happen, of what would come without arriving, outside being, and as though by drifting away?”³² The event of the Other is an ‘advent’ *before* and *after* the ‘happening,’ so to speak, and thus without the present. Indeed, the *already* and *again* of the event of the Other denote this diachrony and passivity of time.

The Subject without Identity

If we may recall Blanchot’s strictly Levinasian description of the ethical relation, which we cited earlier, there are twofoldness and asymmetry in the relation between the I and the Other. In the relation of *myself to the Other*, the Other, as *already* absolved and thus anterior, exceeds my grasp absolutely; The Other is Most-high, the separate. In the relation of the *Other to me* the anterior becomes proximity, weighs upon me, makes me irreplaceable without my having any ability to choose and without my

³² Blanchot, *The Disaster*, 5.

consent. The twofoldness no doubt belongs to the singularity of the ethical relation and signifies rather the two *accents* of the same event. The asymmetry signifies the ambiguity of the inside-outside structure, in its traumatic *reversal*, of the event of the ethical relation. *Totality and Infinity* traces the passivity of the event from the 'outside' (the face of the Other) while *Otherwise Than Being* traces the event (and the exteriority) from the 'inside' of the subject. What Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity*, calls the posteriority of the anterior also structures what he describes as saying, sensibility, proximity in *Otherwise Than Being*.

Otherwise Than Being is yet a special book. What Blanchot says of 'The Saying and the Said' is true of *Otherwise Than Being*: the text spoke to us, as if extraordinary itself spoke to us.³³ *Otherwise Than Being* offers an extraordinary defense of subjectivity beyond the order of phenomenology and ontological hermeneutics. Levinas refines his conception of language through what he famously articulates as the distinction and the relation of the saying and the said. There is an essential ambiguity in Levinas's articulation of the relation, which stems from Levinas's dual purpose of showing a hermeneutic relation between them *and* of going beyond ontological hermeneutics.

In Levinas's terms, philosophy is ontology when it is a disclosure of being, and it is hermeneutics because being's essence is truth and philosophy. In Levinas, as it is in Heidegger, being's exhibition and presence to itself are the horizon of the hermeneutic phenomenology. The essential simultaneity of being and intention or consciousness ("The upsurge of a subjectivity, a soul, a "who," remains correlative with being, that is, simultaneous and one with it" (OTB 28)) requires *and* implies, according to Levinas, a primary temporal separation in being, which Levinas articulates as time getting out of phase with itself, its astonishing divergence from itself ("temporality of time"). The primary getting out of phase makes possible, Levinas contends, a recuperation where nothing is lost. Time's silent work is the ground of the hermeneutic rediscovery of truth, of a reuniting under the unity of apperception (OTB 28–29). Temporal *essence*, thus, "designates this 'modification' without alteration or transition, independent of all qualitative determination, more formal than the silent using up of things which reveals their becoming, already weighted down with matter, the creaking of furniture in the silence of the night" (OTB 29–30). The primary exposition or exhibition of being to itself

³³ Maurice Blanchot, "Our Clandestine Companion," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986), 46.

implies a partition of being-totality, and the equivalence of the parts to the whole. "The whole reflected in a part is an image. Truth then would be produced in the images of being" (OTB 29). The temporality of essence or the essential temporalising is not simply added to visibility, rather it *is* the original visibility of the same to the same or what Levinas would call the first light and the original dissipation of opaqueness (OTB 30).

Language or, more precisely, linguistic signs belong to the modality of being. In the verbalness of the verb *to be*, Levinas suggests, is accomplished essence and temporalization. In both Husserl and Heidegger the notion of intentionality designates indeed the world's immediate presence to consciousness. However, as Levinas writes in 'Language and Proximity,' "to be present to consciousness is not reducible to presence in a receptacle nor to the unfolding of *this* or *that* before the gaze. Presence to consciousness is the fact that *this* which takes form in experience is already alleged or understood or identified *as this* or *as that* and *as present*, that is, precisely thought."³⁴ The originary *understanding* of this *as that* is a priori. What Levinas calls the said or the saying of the said belongs to this dimension of the original, kerygmatical, identification of this *as that*. The kerygmatical identification, the surplus of "spontaneity," so to speak, over the reflexion cannot be, however, reduced to the notion of action as opposed to the receptivity of the sensible. The kerygma of the said is not a priori in the sense of a transcendental category. Rather, as Levinas argues, "[t]his surplus, situated between passivity and activity, is in the language that enters into a *hearsay*, an *already said*, a *doxa*, without which the identifying, naming language would not have been able to approach the sensible ... A word is a nomination, as much as a denomination, a consecrating of the "this as that" by a saying which is also *understanding* and *listening*, absorbed in the said. It is an obedience in the midst of the will ("I hear this or that said"), a kerygma at the bottom of a *fiat*" (OTB 35–36). It is through the *already said* that the identity of entities in the light or resonance of lived time is established. Language then belongs to the work of truth and is the thematization in which being is set, and in which phenomenon is already a phenomenology. "In correlation with the said (in which saying runs the risk of being absorbed as soon as the said is formulated), the saying is indeed thematized, exposes in essence even what is on the *hither side of ontology*, and flows into temporalization of essence" (OTB 46).

Yet, language, for Levinas, is a relationship with a singularity located outside of the theme of the speech. The speaking already presupposes

³⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, "Language and Proximity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 110.

contact rather than our participation in a transparent universality, which Levinas calls the saying without the said, a purely passive side of saying (“on the hither side” of the amphibology of being and entities) that is the condition (or the uncondition), so to speak, of the saying of the said. Levinas describes this passive side of saying as the *event of giving* (a loss, as Blanchot suggests).³⁵ “Saying states and thematizes the said, but signifies it to a neighbor, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said. This signification to the other occurs in proximity” (OTB 46). It is characteristic of both Levinas and Heidegger that they give to the terms that they employ a totally transformed significance. For example, the terms care (*Sorge*) or *Angst* in Heidegger mean something different from their everyday moral use. Likewise, Levinas’s employment of the related terms like passivity and proximity are then, to borrow Asher Horowitz’s argument, “to mean something different from the negation of their opposites.”³⁶ Proximity does not at all mean spatial contiguity, a spatial distance that consciousness measures and totalizes. Proximity signifies the nearest nearness of absolute distance of the Other. But proximity is not akin to the concept and function of dedistancing in *Being and Time*, where it belongs, as double negative, to the worldhood of the world. Proximity in Levinas refers us to passivity. Passivity does not belong to the ontological or even dialectical correlation of activity and passivity. Passivity, says Levinas, is more passive than passivity. The passivity signifies an inversion, or hollowing-out, of intentional consciousness and refers to the *already* and *again*, the diachrony, of the event of the Other, to a time (or a lapse of time) without presence and being. This time, anterior to the essential or ontological temporalization, is the condition (or the uncondition) of the subject and another hypostatization. The point is that terms like passivity, proximity, sensibility *and* saying (without the said) transcend the ontological grasp absolutely.

Levinas discusses the proximity of saying in relation to sensibility in chapter III of *Otherwise Than Being*. In this chapter and the chapters that follow Levinas develops his concept of the subject as the subject of saying and proximity. Levinas takes pain to distinguish sensibility as proximity from sensibility as intuition already amenable to a synopsis of sensation and a synthetic unity of apperception (as it is in Kant) or to a phenomenological meaning constitution (as it is in Husserl) or to an openness upon

³⁵ Blanchot, “Clandestine Companion,” 46.

³⁶ Asher Horowitz, *Ethics at a standstill: history and subjectivity in Levinas and the Frankfurt School* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2008), 95.

being through transcendental imagination (as it is in Heidegger's reading of Kant). Through the work of symbol, sensibility is already amenable to ideas and knowing. But the signification proper to sensibility is anterior to intuition and image and needs to be described in terms of enjoyment and wounding, which are the terms of proximity (OTB 63). Proximity, Levinas says, is more immediate than intuition and is the exposure to wounding, as my exposure to the other. The exposure "enables the wound to reach the subjectivity of the subject complacent in itself and positing itself for itself" (OTB 64). Proximity, as distinct from synthesis, is "a non-coincidence of the ego with itself, restlessness, insomnia, beyond what is found again in the present" (OTB 64). Proximity is a passive saying in which the subject is expelled from any site, is no longer dwelling. In the passive saying the subject is *already* exiled without the exile being interiorized as the consciousness of being exiled. The subject in saying does not just give signs, it becomes a sign (OTB 49). It is in this radical sense that saying is giving. The proximity, passivity and saying are of a piece. It "is a denuding beyond the skin, to the wounds one dies from, denuding to death, being as a vulnerability" (OTB 49).

The subject in saying does not exist as self-identity prior to the saying. The subject is "despite oneself" (OTB 51). The passivity of saying signifies this *despite oneself*. This means that saying does not refer, positively or negatively, to a prior will. The absolute non-coincidence of the self with itself "signifies in the form of one-penetrated-by-the-other" (OTB 49). This is what Levinas calls the ambiguity of pain. "The for-the-other (or sense) turns into by-the-other, into suffering by a thorn burning the flesh, but *for nothing*" (OTB 50). Passivity is thus an adversity of suffering in the very living human corporeality (anterior to intentional consciousness). Pain is not a symptom of frustrated will. Rather, as Levinas contends, it is only in terms of the possibility of pain that one should speak of the will. The self is despite oneself, or even against oneself. It is in this *measurelessly* passive sense that one must speak of the responsibility which is saying. The word "responsible" generally suggests – in a bourgeois manner — a mature and conscientious man who acts with circumspection, who calculates and decides. In Levinas, responsibility is radically displaced. No longer does it belong to consciousness. The responsible saying to the other presupposes an overturning, a withdrawing of self from my order, from all orders. The responsibility is unchosen and without my consent. "It is a having been offered without any holding back and not the generosity of offering oneself, which would be an act, and already presupposes the unlimited undergoing of the sensibility" (OTB 75). The responsible saying (as the event of

giving and of loss) cannot “devolve from a *free* commitment, that is, a present” (OTB 51). “In the having been offered without any holding back the past infinitive form underlines the present, the non-commencement, the non-initiative of the sensibility” (OTB 75).

One should understand Levinas’s conception of immediacy (of passive contact) in this sense of anachrony. The relation that is immediate is grave. Not only does it rule out mediation; the presence of the infinite must somehow be understood in the past tense. This abyssal and paradoxical non-present of the immediate is, Levinas would say, the persecution and affliction of the other, the other as affliction. Levinas calls the relation maternity. “Is not the restlessness of someone persecuted but a modification of maternity, the groaning of the wounded entrails by those it will bear or has borne” (OTB 75)? The maternal subject is the pre-emergent, the un-posed; it belongs to the pre-birth or pre-nature sensibility. Sensibility, as maternity and vulnerability, is the irreducible materiality, the substantivity, of the subject in saying. Levinas’s use of the word “incarnation” refers to this sensibility. The incarnate subject is the other in the ‘same’, is the other in the skin of one’s skin. Incarnation in no way refers to a transcendental operation of a subject situated in the midst of the world which it represents. Sensibility is anterior to the synthetic unity of apperception which puts consciousness into relationship with body. On the contrary, the sensibility and materiality of the subject are the very locus of the for-the-other. It is because of this prior signification (prior to the said, to the synthetic apperception) that the subject is the subject of flesh and blood (OTB 77). “Subjectivity of flesh and blood in matter – the signifyingness of sensibility, the one-for-the-other itself – is the preoriginal signifyingness that gives sense, because it gives” (OTB 78). Levinas grounds the Cartesian separation of *cogito* from the body in this “unintelligibility of incarnation,” in the non-self-identity, in the non-coincidence. Paradoxically, the identity of self is this non-coincidence, is the displacement of oneself which the one-for-the-other signifies (OTB 79). There is an insurmountable ambiguity in Levinas’s account of the subject, in what he famously calls “the curvature of intersubjective space” (TI 291). The ambiguity in Levinas’s formulation of the subject as substance remains otherwise than not only Hegel’s conception of substance as the subject, which, as Levinas suggests, reduces the in-itself to a movement of mediation re-covering the immediate after the negation of the immediate (OTB 79). The ambiguity of the subject as substance also evidently goes against Heidegger’s famous deconstruction of the subject, which reduces the density of the existent to the neutral light of being.

Saying, proximity, is a responsibility that Levinas characterizes as obsession rather than a chosen duty which one derives from a freedom. The responsibility characteristic of obsession is a responsibility for what I have not committed; it is being accused for the faults of the others. The responsible subject should be understood in the accusative case (though it is not a case). I am bound to the neighbor (the other, the third), before all assumption, before all consent or commitment, bound to the neighbor's alterity that weighs on me. It is *yet* "a relation of kinship outside of all biology" (OTB 87). In the responsibility characteristic of obsession arise commitment and freedom, "which is termed finite by contrast with the freedom of choice of which consciousness is the essential modality" (OTB 76). The obsession is the affliction in the night that consciousness dissipates into the light of a concept through the work of the negative. If obsession is ignorance then that ignorance or folly is not the naivety of humanity still shut up in an original identity, prior to the mediation of concept, but is the preoriginary hither side of abnegation (OTB 84). Thus, Levinas describes the relation characteristic of obsession as "*more determinate* than the relations that are ordered into a totality." "It is the immediacy of a skin and a face, a skin which is always a modification of a face, a face that is weighted down with a skin" (OTB 85). The ambiguity of the proximity and the saying stems from its being marked by the eventness of its temporalization, from its being in two times ("transcendent diachrony"), like the time of fecundity, which remain outside or beyond the time of reminiscence and recuperation. The subject's temporalization is not only not the operation of transcendental consciousness or imagination, but is itself excluded from any temporal synthesis (OTB 85).

The subject as self (the oneself) is hypostatized into a singularity. The oneself is singular *par excellence*. Levinas calls the event of hypostatization recurrence. Why recurrence? Because the hypostatization into a singularity is, paradoxical as it may sound, a singular heteronomy. The term in recurrence is absolute and yet non-synthetic. The self is in recurrence precisely because it is not reducible to a relation that can ground it. The self is singular and yet is in recurrence because it is absolutely a term and yet is not reducible to synthesis of self-consciousness, because its first time *is* the second time. Outside of consciousness, of being, the self is expelled into the singularity of in-itself. The first time is *as* the second time: the time of recurrence is anachronous, its plot being anarchic, "already older than the time of consciousness" (OTB 107). The "anarchic plot" of recurrence, the first time being the second time, "does not convey dispersion into phases, exterior to one another, in a flux of

immanent time in the Husserlian sense, retaining the past and biting on the future" (OTB 104). "Prior to the play of being," the oneself is a singular term in hypostasis. The hypostasis of the self is a withdrawal in oneself before it begins in spontaneity, is already exiled into oneself, is expelled, as it were, into the outside. Being already outside when expelled into the identity, the self is split up, which is again "not a dialectical scission, nor a process equalizing difference" (OTB 107). "The oneself has to be conceived outside of all substantial coinciding of self with self" (OTB 114).

The hypostasis into the responsible self is thus distinct from the hypostasis of the posited subject *a la* Fichte or Hegel. The self is de-positated in its being anarchically hypostatized as the one-for-the-other. The self is anarchically reduced to itself, expelled into the outside of being (OTB 105). The event of the other hypostatizes me, says Levinas, as elected and irreplaceable even though the election disindividualizes me. This is the difficult side of the anarchic plot of responsibility. As Blanchot reflects on the anarchic plot of election:

It is the other who exposes me to "unity," causing me to believe in an irreplaceable singularity, for I feel I must not fail him; and at the same time he withdraws me from what would make me unique: I am not indispensable; in me anyone at all is called by the other – anyone at all as the one who owes him aid. ... The responsibility with which I am charged is not mine, and because of it I am no longer myself.³⁷

In a responsibility characteristic of obsession the self is a hostage. The self as hostage, Levinas would suggest, is already substituted for the others. More than once Levinas refers to Rimbaud's saying "I is an other." But Levinas interprets the saying not as the symptom of alienation and betrayal of oneself. The saying rather expresses the experience of him who *puts himself in another's place*, accuses himself for another's distress and pain.³⁸ In this precise sense the self is a *sub-jectum*. "It is under the weight of the universe, responsible for everything" (OTB 116). The self is *sub-jectum* as it is crushed into responsibility, as it arises outside of freedom and non-freedom. It may be proper to think, as Blanchot does, of Levinas's conception of the subject (as *sub-jectum*) as subjectivity without any subject: the wounded space, the hurt of the dying.³⁹ But Levinas would maintain that the subject as responsible saying is individuated or

³⁷ Blanchot, *The Disaster*, 13.

³⁸ Levinas, "No Identity," 145.

³⁹ Blanchot, *The Disaster*, 30.

superindividuated in itself, in its skin, without sharing the *conatus essendi* of beings which are beings in themselves (OTB 118).

In contrast to the end of man or the subject by human sciences and by Heidegger's onto-phenomenology, Levinas conceives man, outside of a genus, outside of being, on the basis of a responsibility more ancient than the *conatus* of a substance or inward identification. The impossible inwardness is more exterior than exteriority, already for-the-other, without a return to the self-same, to the point of fission. In his essay "No Identity," written during the student revolt of 1968, Levinas calls the subject young. The term "young" means something different from its normal signification. No longer is it the negation of ageing. "The adjective indicates the surplus of meaning over the being that bears it and claims to measure and restrict it."⁴⁰ Curiously, Levinas, in this essay, also uses the term "authenticity" to describe the subject in revolt; but he reinterprets authenticity (of the youth) as meaning, beyond being and being-toward-death, a surplus, supplementary, responsibility (I am responsible even for the other's responsibility), a surplus responsibility he earlier called being-for-after-my-death.

⁴⁰ Levinas, "No Identity," 151.

PART TWO

CRITICAL THEORY OF HISTORY

CHAPTER THREE

MEMORY, MODERNITY, REPETITION: WALTER BENJAMIN'S ETHICO-POLITICAL HISTORY

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas opposes the ethical, which belongs to the domain of eschatology, to the historical. The idea of totality dominates the relationship that is historical, where the unicity of each present is sacrificed to a teleological future, where each exception is recuperated in the identity of the self-same. In thinking of history as the domain where totality gives command Levinas not only thinks of Hegel, but also of Heidegger. The Hegelian-Marxism (e.g. Lukács and Sartre), while carrying on the German Critical tradition, nonetheless consecrates a teleological meta-narrative of history. The historical subject in Hegelian-Marxism is the subject of totalization. And Heidegger, while abandoning the historicist project of totalization, still thinks of history, as Levinas and Derrida would suggest, as a gathering of being. Now, the pressing question is whether or not historiography can be reconciled, if that is the word, with the singularity and the eventness of happening, and yet retain the critical dimension of thought without being totalizing. In this chapter I turn to Walter Benjamin's "Critical Theory of history" in order to gain insight into a historical thinking which would be responsive to singularity. I will try to argue that even though Benjamin is a dialectician *par excellence* his dialectical thinking works against the grain of totalization and identity thinking. The distinction will be drawn between Benjamin and Heidegger in spite of, or perhaps because of, the similarity between their respective avant-gardiste conceptions of history.

"The modern is a principal accent" of Benjamin's thought.¹ An important aspect of my reading of Benjamin is to situate his historiographic thought in the context of his theoretical articulation of the experience of the modern. I wish to mention, in this context, that Benjamin's and Adorno's idea of natural history sets the critical perspective of my reading of Benjamin's historiography. Without going into detail, suffice it here to

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 10. All further references to the convolute N of *Arcades Project* will be made parenthetically in the text as "N" followed by the fragment number.

remark that what Benjamin offers us is a singular, natural historical account of the modern. The experience of the modern, for Benjamin, is “devoid of substance;”² its time is homogeneous and empty. In several places, Benjamin mentions that the aim of his book on the baroque plays is partly to “expose the seventeenth century to the light of the present day” (N 1a, 2). There is a certain originary technicity in the experience of the modern. Similarly, script rather than language, death’s head rather than face, citation rather than mimesis – these are the allegorical emblems in which the baroque world is “expressed,” or better, “shattered.”³ Benjamin’s historical materialism can be seen as a response to, and a match for, the modern experience. One of my crucial arguments, to be developed through a reading of Benjamin’s reflections on Marcel Proust, as well as of Benjamin’s theses and fragments, is that the memory characterizing historical materialism is a *temporal experience of image*. A certain temporal asymmetry, and what I would like call a determinate non-identity (between image and experience, between *Gedachtnis* and *eingedenken*, between repetition and the new) structures the dialectical image, which is the enigmatic core of Benjamin’s historical thinking. Benjamin’s conception of actualization, to which repetition belongs as a strategy without finality, has to be grounded, I will argue, in the asymmetry between the messianic and the historical. Crucial in this context will be the idea that repetition, as a theatrical concept, is a *relation* of difference (non-semblance) between the “fore-history” and the “after-history,” the relation that constructs the interiority of the event of repetition or historical event. The construction of the “inside” of an event from a certain “outside” is the work of repetition.

Death and the Aura of Memory

In “On the Image of Proust,” Benjamin speaks of Proustean time as “convoluted,” as opposed to “boundless” time. Proust’s true interest, Benjamin says, lies in “the passage of time in its most real – that is, intertwined – form” (SW 2 244). The Proustean experience of time is a retroactive

² Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Volume 4, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), 330. All further references to *Selected Writings* will be cited parenthetically in the text as “SW” followed by the volume and the page numbers.

³ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 72.

experience of time that has passed. The time of the present, lived time, is a time under the sign and shadow of death. The infinite effort of *memoire involontaire* consists in rescuing the un-lived time from death. "On a larger scale, however," Benjamin writes, "the threatening, suffocating crisis was death, which he was constantly aware of, most of all while he was writing" (SW 2 246). Benjamin describes memory as a "match for the inexorable process of aging" (SW 2 244). In a fascinating paragraph, Benjamin describes the death as manifested in aging, to which Proust responds by "letting the whole world age by a lifetime in an instant":

[Proust] is filled with the insight that none of us has time to live the true dramas of the life that we are destined for. This is what ages us – this and nothing else. The wrinkles and creases in our faces are the registration of the great passions, vices, insights that called on us; but we, the masters, were not home. (SW 2 244–45)

Our unhomeliness, our oblivion is precisely the sign of the domination of death. It is the work of death, Benjamin would argue. In "The Storyteller," Benjamin returns to the idea of the work of death that is presupposed and matched by remembrance: "Death is the sanction for everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, his stories refer back to natural history" (SW 3 151).

The paradigmatic theme of natural history in Benjamin's extraordinary study of the seventeenth-century German baroque dramas, *The Origin of the German Mourning Plays*, conveys the idea of history as "petrified nature," and nature as "petrified history." The popular baroque emblems of human skeletons and skulls signify the idea of history as mortification and transience. It is Theodor Adorno who, in the remarkably complex essay "The Idea of Natural History," offers a philosophical interpretation of Benjamin's idea of natural history. "The Idea of Natural History" was the lecture Adorno delivered to the Kant Society in Frankfurt in 1932. A brief discussion of some of the crucial themes of Adorno's essay might give us an important perspective on the broader historiographic dimension of Benjamin's thinking, to which I will return later. I will also refer to the theme of natural history in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*.

In "The Idea of Natural History," Adorno compares Benjamin's concept of natural history with the Lukácsian idea of "second nature." The latter designates, for Lukács, the reified world of capitalism, the alienated world, the world of convention. Adorno quotes from Lukács's *The Theory of The Novel*: "This (second) nature is not mute, corporeal, and foreign to the senses like first nature: it is petrified, estranged, complex of meaning

that is no longer able to awaken inwardness, it is a charnel-house of rotted interiorities.”⁴ The charnel-house, Adorno suggests, is the cipher, the signifier. For Lukács, the petrified history is nature, or the petrified life of nature is an effect of historical “development.” But Lukács, in keeping with the German idealist tradition, can only think of this charnel-house within the horizon of eschato-theological totalization. For Adorno, Benjamin represents “the decisive turning-point in the formulation of the problem of natural history.”⁵ The emblem of natural history is “a cipher to be read.” Natural history is the “original-history of signification.”⁶ Natural history appears as sign language of transience. History and nature meet deeply in the elemental transience. Adorno thus articulates the essential difference between Lukács and Benjamin:

If Lukács demonstrates the retransformation of the historical, as that which has been, into nature, then here is the other side of the phenomenon: nature itself is seen as transitory nature, as history.⁷

Here Benjamin’s concept of allegory and its difference from symbol is of crucial importance. What marks their difference is “the decisive category of time.”⁸ As Adorno quotes from Benjamin:

Whereas in the symbol, with the glorification of death and destruction, the transfigured face of nature reveals itself fleetingly in light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratia* of history, a petrified, primordial landscape.⁹

Allegory “expresses” the original-historical relationship between nature – as what appears – and its signification, i.e. transience. Nature never appears alone; it appears with its double, its destructive double, i.e. death. Allegory expresses this original doubling of nature (life) and history (death).

According to Adorno’s reading, the structure of Benjamin’s natural history is a constellation, “namely those of transience, signification, the idea of nature and the idea of history.”¹⁰ Nature and history are not simply fused with each other; “rather they break apart and interweave at the

⁴ Theodor Adorno, “The Idea of Natural History,” trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor, *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984): 120.

⁵ Adorno, “Natural history,” 119.

⁶ Adorno, “Natural History,” 119.

⁷ Adorno, “Natural History,” 119.

⁸ Adorno, “Natural History,” 120.

⁹ Adorno, “Natural History,” 120.

¹⁰ Adorno, “Natural History,” 120.

same time in such a fashion that nature appears as a sign for history and history wherever it seems to be most historical, appears as a sign for nature."¹¹

In the chapter "World Spirit and Natural History" of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno returns to Benjamin's and Marx's concept of natural history as a counter-concept to the Hegelian concepts of World Spirit and universal history. Adorno's basic point is that what Hegel affirms as spirit is the negativity of the social. The coercive primacy of the social totality over the individual acts and the particular is hypostatized by Hegel as world spirit. By hypostatizing the social as spirit Hegel covers up the essentially antagonistic nature of the social totality. World spirit, according to Adorno, is nothing but the ideological inversion and mystification of the alienated social reality that appears to individuals as other. "Once men have learned about the preponderance of the universal, it is all but inescapable for them to transfigure it into a spirit, as the higher being which they must propitiate. Coercion acquires meaning for them. And not without all reason: for the abstract universal of the whole, which applies the coercion, is akin to the universality of thought, the spirit."¹² Adorno thus takes Hegel to task for offering ideological legitimacy to the coercive sociality: "The world spirit is; but it is not a spirit. It is the very negativity, rather, which Hegel shifted from the spirit's shoulders upon the shoulders of the ones who must obey it, the ones whose defeat doubles the verdict that the difference between them and objectivity is what is untrue and evil."¹³

For Adorno and, as we will see later, for Benjamin, the concept of universal history serves as the ideological apotheosis of universal domination. It "became the more problematical the closer the unified world came to being a total process."¹⁴ Yet, Adorno does not deny "universal history" *tout court*. Hegel himself, Adorno reminds us, conceived universal history unified merely on account of its contradictions.¹⁵ The denial of universal history *tout court* would amount to a denial of the necessary mediation of the part by the process itself and lead to a positivist consolidation of pure facticity. "Universal history must be construed and denied."¹⁶ "After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the

¹¹ Adorno, "Natural History," 120

¹² Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, (New York: Continuum, 1973), 316.

¹³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 304.

¹⁴ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 319.

¹⁵ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 319.

¹⁶ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 320.

catastrophe to come" it would be wrong to insist, as the dominant tendencies of Marxism do, that history carries and unfolds a plan for better world. "No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb."¹⁷ And that is precisely why it would be cynical to overlook the coercive necessity of the unifying process. Without enchanting the (universal) history into an idea it has to be conceived as permanent and universal catastrophe.¹⁸ This is where Adorno comes closest to Marx's and, more especially, to Benjamin's concept of natural history.

The idea of natural history, in Benjamin and Adorno, offers a critical counter-concept to the concept of universal history and to the ontological concept of historicity *à la* Heidegger. Adorno quotes from Marx's *Capital*: "I comprehend the development of economic formation of society as a process of natural history..."¹⁹ Unveiling modern society's "economic law of motion" precisely means to denaturalize the so-called law of nature. However, the law works like a natural necessity "because of its inevitable character under the prevailing conditions of production. Ideology is not superimposed as a detachable layer on the being of society; it is inherent in that being. It rests upon abstraction, which is of the essence of the barter process."²⁰ Marx's natural historical account of the nature of modern society also, by the same token, radically dissociates history from ontology. Marx's *Capital*, "in a phenomenology of the anti-spirit," provides a social archaeology of what appears as the immutable nature (and history) and "traces it from the analysis of the merchandise form to the theory of collapse."²¹

Deontologizing history means to *interpret* historical sign in its passing, in its diachrony. Natural history *signifies*. Natural history illuminates history as signification, the original-history of signification. Here origin is *already* transience; decay is the origin. Original-history, in this sense, is originary historicity, which is not an abstraction from historic experiences, which would then amount to another hypostatization, to a divination of history. If nature and history form a constellation as signification of transience, then the constellation can itself be momentary. As Adorno writes, "The moment in which nature and history become commensurable

¹⁷ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 320.

¹⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 320.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 354.

²⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 354.

²¹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 356.

with each other is the moment of passing.”²² The important point is that for Adorno, as for Benjamin, that moment of passing is precisely present as a ruin. In the “Idea of Natural History,” Adorno writes, “As transience all original-history is absolutely present. It is present in the form of signification.”²³ In the baroque plays, history enters the stage as writing, that is, as trace. In other words, the present, it is Benjamin’s insight, is the *site* of original-history. The latter, Adorno comments, is “signified in allegory, *returns* in the allegorical.”²⁴ The apparently paradoxical concept of the present as a site of passing, and of the return of what has passed, offers us a proper angle and perspective on the Benjaminian idea of the present as a critical or an interruptive moment of history, and thereby provides us an entry into Benjamin’s broader notion of historiography as a record and articulation of memory. For what *returns*, with the original-history, in the allegory, is the other, suppressed, past.

The present as a site of passing and of return is endowed with the *claim* that Benjamin describes as “a *weak* messianic power” (Thesis II). The messianic has a structure of haunting in that it returns at the moment of passing. Benjamin calls this haunting “the unforgettable.” The unforgettable is, however, not a naïve antithesis of what is forgotten. Rather, as we will see later in the context of Benjamin’s reflections on Proust, the unforgettable is situated in a dialectic of forgetting and remembering. Something becomes unforgettable when it threatens to be irretrievably lost. In both “The Task of The Translator” and “The Storyteller,” the unforgettable appears – or, to be more precise, returns – as a *claim*.

In “The Task of The Translator,” Benjamin states his central point at the very beginning: “The translation is a form” (SW 1 254). As a form, translation is not simply derivative of, or secondary to the original. Rather, as a form or a mode, translation issues from the original itself. “[T]he laws governing the translation lie within the original, contained in the issue of its translatability” (SW 1 254). Translatability is the essential feature of the original. Benjamin explains his contention by introducing the crucial idea of the “afterlife” of art and of language as such: “A translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife” (SW 1 254). The idea of afterlife of artworks, Benjamin insists, must be regarded with “an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity” (SW 1 254). The life of a work of art, or, for that matter, language as such, according to Benjamin, is

²² Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 359.

²³ Adorno, “Natural History,” 121.

²⁴ Adorno, “Natural History,” 121 (emphasis added).

characterized by a beyond. Its significance and its truth lie beyond its natural presence, beyond its “organic corporeality” (SW 1 254). But Benjamin distinguishes the idea of the afterlife of truth from theological notions like “scepter of the soul” (SW 1 255). On the contrary, “in the final analysis, the range of life must be determined by the standpoint of history rather than that of nature.... The philosopher’s task consists in comprehending all of natural life through the more encompassing life of history” (SW 1 255). The expression “encompassing life of history,” we know by now, should be read with the *reversal* of signification that natural history requires. So, the historicity of art and language should be understood beyond the category of growth, ripening and unfolding, and thus beyond the category of organic corporeality.²⁵ Historicity signifies the movement of mortification *and* – this is Benjamin’s most crucial point – “the course of its survival” (SW 1 255). So, it is not so much life as *after*-life that determines the translatability and reproducibility of linguistic art work. The original itself attains its truth, its actuality, in its reproduction, which also means that the life of the original is already marked by death, that the original lives on, as it were, *after* death. The unforgettable is precisely that which lives on and makes its anachronic claim. It is the task of the translator (analogously, of the historiographer) to respond to this claim.

It is not my intent here to discuss in detail Benjamin’s enigmatic “The Task of The Translator.” What we are trying to see, rather, is how in that essay, as in “The Storyteller,” Benjamin articulates the historiographic dimension as a movement not so much of life as of mortification and of living-on, and also as a space of remembrance and bereavement. In “The Task of The Translator,” the idea of the after-life allows Benjamin to speak, in metaphysical terms, of the essential relation between the law of translation (and, by extension, language) and of remembrance. Benjamin writes:

It should be pointed out ... that certain correlative concepts retain their meaning, and possibly their foremost significance, if they are not from the outset used exclusively with reference to man. One might, for example, speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it be forgotten, that predicate would imply not a falsehood but merely a claim unfulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it *is* fulfilled: God’s remembrance. Analogously, the translatability of linguistic

²⁵ I owe this point to Paul de Man’s reading of Benjamin, in his essay “Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of The Translator,’” in *Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them. (SW 1 254)

"God's remembrance" is perhaps an analogue for the messianic end of what Benjamin calls pure language. In "The Storyteller," epic memory serves as a model of that holistic remembrance. But in Benjamin's thinking, that holistic memory is not accessible to man as it does not belong to historical time proper. In his "Theologico-Political Fragment," Benjamin draws a distinction, even a disjunction, between messianic temporality and the temporality of history. The messianic represents a cessation, a termination of historical time. "Only the Messiah himself completes all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the messianic" (SW 3 305). More importantly, as we will see later, the messianic end of remembering the unforgettable is available to us (in history) only as an instantaneous image. That image is a concern of the present because as a *site* of passing, the present itself is the unforgettable. As Benjamin writes in "On the Concept of History":

The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again.... For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.²⁶

The only instant in which the image of memory flashes up, as we read in the next thesis, is the "moment of danger" (Thesis VI). Elsewhere, Benjamin refers to that image as the straw for the drowning man: "The smallest guarantee, the straw at the drowning man grasps.... *Eingedenken* as the straw."²⁷

And that moment of danger is, as we read in "The Storyteller," the moment of dying. This brings us back to the point we started with: the relation between dying and the form of memory that we know as storytelling. Let me quote an important passage from "The Storyteller," where, just after giving an historical account – an account that already blurs the conventional distinction between history and story – of the epochal change in man's perception of death, Benjamin writes about the relation between death and the unforgettable:

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," (Thesis V) in *Selected Writings*, Volume 4, P. 390–91. Further references to the "On the Concept of History" will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Thesis" along with corresponding thesis number.

²⁷ Quoted in Wohlfarth Irving, "On the Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin's Last Reflections," *Glyph* 3, (1978): 148.

Yet, characteristically, it is not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life – and this is the stuff that stories are made of – which first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end – unfolding the views of himself in which he has encountered himself without being aware of it – suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges, and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in the act of dying possesses for the living around him. This authority lies at the very origin of the story. (SW 3 151)

Storytelling, Modernity, and Image as Non-Identity

In "The Storyteller," Benjamin looks at another world, another time, which is "remote from us" and "is moving ever further away" (SW 3 143). There is pathos, but no revivalist nostalgia, in this looking back. Story is no longer a "force" in its "living efficacy" (SW 3 151). Storytelling embodied a structure of experience whose ground is permanently eroded by what Benjamin calls modernity. So, to reflect on "someone like Leskov as a storyteller does not mean bringing him closer to us but, rather, means increasing our distance from him" (SW 3 151). The word "reflection" in the title of the essay involves a "proper distance and angle" of observation (SW 3 151).

Why does Benjamin reflect on the story, then? What is precisely at stake in this retrospective reflection? What is at stake is not simply the story and its vanishing beauty, but the historiographic dimension to which story belongs as one of its forms.²⁸ Story involves a specific form of memory that Benjamin still wishes to retain in his own version of historical materialism. So, the proper angle of vision, in the context of our reading, can be achieved when Benjamin's reflections on story are read together with his "On the Concept of History" and with his reflections on another "storyteller" of the modern times, Marcel Proust. For in both the texts Benjamin seeks to retain a certain messianic trait (in his word, "utopia") that the storyteller's remembering involves while at the same time canceling its historicist legacy.

Benjamin opens up this historiographic dimension in sections XII and XIII of "The Storyteller." It is evident that in these two crucial sections, as well as later in the essay, he keeps faith with the Lukascian triadic structure of the development of the literary forms in the West, as it is

²⁸ In my discussion of the historiographic dimension of the storytelling and the novel, I am indebted to Irving Wohlfarth's canonical essay mentioned above.

articulated in *The Theory of the Novel*. Storytelling as an essentially oral literary form can only originate in a space where experience is shared and transmitted from one to another. In contrast to the novel, the story presupposes a collective sharing of experience, a space of community based upon tradition. "[T]he listener's naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the willing listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story" (SW 3 153). Thus, the story, by virtue of its structural possibility, belongs to the epic dimension of memory. As Benjamin writes, "Memory is the epic faculty par excellence. Only by virtue of a comprehensive memory can epic writing absorb the course of events on the one hand and, on the other hand, makes its peace with the passing of these, with the power of death" (SW 3 154). It is *memory* that "creates the chain of tradition which transmits an event from generation to generation" (SW 3 154). And it is in this context that Benjamin relates the literary forms of the story and the novel to the broader question of historiography. The important and distinctive aspect of Benjamin's analysis is that he relates the development of the western literary forms to the question of the *temporalization* of memory itself. According to Benjamin, it is historiography that forms the common ground of all forms of the epic. Benjamin uses the term "historiography" in the broadest possible sense, that is, as "the record kept by memory" and which "constitutes the creative matrix of the various epic forms" (SW 3 154). The epic is the oldest form of historiography, its original and undivided form. Epic art has "Mnemosyne, the rememberer" as its muse and contains within itself the germs of two distinct and partial literary forms of memory: the story and the novel. The emergence of two distinct literary forms of memory and of historiography signifies "a world historical parting of the ways" (SW 3 154). The passages of occasional invocations of the Muse in Homeric epics contain within themselves the unity of two distinct forms of memory: "the perpetuating remembrance of the novelist as contrasted with the short-lived reminiscences of the storyteller. The first is dedicated to *one* hero, *one* odyssey, or *one* battle; the second to *many* diffuse occurrences. In other words, it is *remembrance* [*Eingedenken*], the Muse-derived element of the novel, which is added to recollection [*Gedachtnisse*], the muse-derived element of the story, the unity of their origin in memory [*Erinnerung*] having disappeared with the decline of the epic" (SW 3 154). The historiographic counterpart of the story is the chronicle. "The chronicler is the history-teller" (SW 3 152). The chronicler, unlike the historian or writer of history, whose task it is to explain the happenings with which he deals, has from the outset lifted the

load of explanation from his shoulder and only shows how his tales “are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world” (SW 3 153). The storyteller, Benjamin says, is the secularized chronicler. His remembrance rescues the events of the past from history. What Benjamin writes of the chronicler in Thesis III is true of the storyteller too:

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor Ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past. (Thesis III)

The novelistic memory [*Eingedenken*] is messianic, too, in that it bears testimony to the cessation of happening and the founding moment of history. A new calendar that is introduced by the revolution is an exemplary form of such *Eingedenken*. We read in Thesis XV:

The great revolution introduced a new calendar. The initial date of the initial day of calendar serves as a historical time-lapse camera. And, basically, it is the same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance. (Thesis XV)

But after the fragmentation of the epic unity, if we follow Benjamin's Lukácsian narrative, *Getachtnisse* and *Eingedenken* remain in sharp contrast. Only a redeemed humanity will get them in their unity. The past will become “citable in all its moment.” That day is Judgment day. Benjamin's historical materialism would be a rearticulation of the unity of the two forms of memory or, as Irving Wohlfarth reminds us, a remembrance of that unity.²⁹ But it is not just the utopian hope that is in question in Benjamin's articulation of such unity in historical materialism. Rather, this rearticulation is a response to the present that we know as the modern. Modernity designates a structure of experience and of temporality that has eroded the basis of storytelling. Whereas the story is based on the transmissibility of experience that makes possible the authentic continuity of tradition, modernity represents “a tremendous shattering of tradition,” a historical shock.

Before moving on it is important to assert that for Benjamin, unlike much of sociological tradition, modernity is no mere name for a historical period and the specific social forms that belongs to it. Rather, it designates a structure of experience and its distinctive temporality.³⁰

²⁹ Wohlfarth, “On the Messianic Structure,” 151.

³⁰ Peter Osborne has described Benjamin conception of the modern as “a kind of phenomenology of structure of consciousness” rather than a period term. See Peter Osborne,

In "The Storyteller," Benjamin notes the distinctive characteristic of storytelling as "an artisanal form of communication" (SW 3 149). "It does not aim to convey the pure "in itself" or gist of a thing, like information or a report. It submerges the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus, traces of the storyteller cling to a story the way the handprints of the potter cling to a clay vessel" (SW 3 149). Modernity, Benjamin suggests, marks an epochal shift from the mode of production based on artisan manufacture to that based on the industrial machine. Crucial, in the context of the machine, is the decline of practice. With practice as the basis, Benjamin writes, quoting Marx, "each particular area of production finds its appropriate technical form in *experience* and *slowly* perfects it" (SW 4 329). The cumulative experience of practice provides the ground for the "process of assimilation, which takes place in the depths" (SW 3 149), which is also the defining characteristic of storytelling. In contrast, machine production "requires prior training of the worker" and the training should be differentiated from practice (SW 4 329). "His work has been sealed off from experience; practice counts for nothing in the factory" (SW 4 329). Each segment of work at the machine is without any connection with the preceding operation for the very reason that it is its exact repetition. The work at the industrial machine, Benjamin concludes, is "devoid of substance" (SW 4 330). It is the voiding of substance, the experience of *being voided*, which characterizes the experience of not only the industrial worker, but of the modern as such. As Benjamin reflects in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," modernity designates the structure of experience "for which exposure to shock [*Chockerlebnis*] has become the norm" (SW 4 318). The shock experience of the passerby in a crowded city, the worker's experience at the industrial machine, the film actor's sense of exile in front of the camera, and the mass receptions of film are all metonyms of the "same" shock experience. In his essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin employs the Freudian interpretive model to explain the paradoxical situation of consciousness without experience. In Freud's terms, a living organism confronted with a traumatic shock uses its protective shield against stimuli by readily registering in consciousness such "external" threat without retaining them in memory. The latter becomes the repository of what is repressed, of unconscious traces. Consciousness becomes the empty space of memory, of memories

"Small-scale victories, Large-scale Defeats: Walter Benjamin's politics of time," in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1994), 83.

without memory. True memories become involuntary, become heavier with *traces* of “what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject as an isolated experience [*Erlebnis*]” (SW 4 317).

In the empty space of modern experience, what is new always appears as “ever-always-the-same;” the new as the eternal recurrence of the same. Such, according to Benjamin, is also the fetish character of commodities, whose privileged example is fashion. The thorough impoverishment of experience has its menacing impact on human communication as such. The communicability of experience is replaced by a new form of communication: information. The latter “reflects the increasing atrophy of experience” (SW 4 316). It is one of the features of information (a news item, for example) that it conveys the happenings without connecting them with the experience of the reader. The brevity of information means that it does not survive the moment when it is fresh for consumption. It does not enter the tradition.

Modernity, as it appears in Benjamin’s phenomenological – singular *and* natural historical – account, is that temporal space where experience is characterized by a loss of what is experienced. The experience is marked by time lag. The modern experience, if we follow Benjamin’s employment of Freud, is a retroactive experience. In this sense, the modern is a temporal space *already* marked by a certain *post*. The prefix “post” *before* the modern means that modern as a beginning is a beginning *after*, an after-beginning. “Post” expresses the *mode* of existing of the modern.

Now, it is the task of the historical materialist to re-articulate a historiographic *form* that can offer an adequate, dialectical, match for the experiential structure of the modern. To return to the story will be a pure nostalgia. Worse still, storytelling after modernity will amount to the empty chronology characteristic of historicism that tells “the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary” (Thesis supplement A). In an historicist chronicle, epic continuity is transformed into a homogeneous empty time of “tradition” and into the narrative of boundless progress. The empty continuum of “tradition” and progress is precisely what Benjamin calls catastrophe. Thus “historical materialism must renounce the epic element of history” (N 9a, 6).

And yet, historical materialism has the task of articulating a unity of two forms of memory. To be sure, this projected unity would not be a fusion of the story and the novel; neither of them would remain the same in this unity. Rather, it would appear as a constellation in the form of an image. The model of messianic remembrance in contemporary

modernity, Benjamin asserts, is neither the story nor even the novel, but the image. One of the elementary doctrine(s) of historical materialism is, Benjamin reflects generally, that "History decays into images, not into stories" (N11, 4). The remembering thinker gathers his energy to seize hold of the image that "in the next moment is irretrievably lost" (N9, 7). Benjamin finds the literary model of this historiographic form in the work of Marcel Proust.

The time lag, the lateness, which characterizes the structure of experience and of temporality of modernity also structures the remembering work of Proust. In "On the Image of Proust," Benjamin quotes Jacques Rivière's enigmatic observation that "Marcel Proust died of the same inexperience which permitted him to write his works" (SW 2 246). The word "inexperience" in this quotation does not so much mean a simple lack of experience as, rather, a time lag *in* experience. Experience itself is structured by this lag. In "the alienating, blinding experience of the age of large-scale industrialism" (SW 4 314), experience means the empty message of information that we can recollect at will. This empty (in)experience is the basis of what Proust calls *voluntary memory*, "one that is in the service of the intellect" (SW 4 315). But the true dramas and experiences of existence that call on us, but which "we the masters" "never (have) time to live," *become* experience only in the instant of spontaneous remembrance. This is the domain of Proustean *involuntary memory*. What lies at the bottom of Proust's frenetic, infinite, efforts is the desire to "rejuvenate," in a flash of involuntary memory, things that have always already been past, the past that he has never experienced, the past that, in this precise sense, never existed as such. This desire – Benjamin describes it as the "elegiac idea of happiness" (SW 2 239) – to rejuvenate the past, or more correctly, a particular past, and pull it together with the present in an instant "transforms existence into a preserve of memory" (SW 2 239). This is the *other* side of the "inexperience" to which Rivière refers. The inexperience "which had begun to crush him" (SW 2 246) also becomes, for the *writer*, the enabling condition of the involuntary memory to which the writer's enormous work of remembrance is dedicated.

The time of involuntary memory is convoluted, intertwined time, as opposed to historicism's boundless time. It is a constellation of a particular past and a particular present in a space-bound form. In this constellation, the particular past becomes recognized, for the first time, as a mark, a trace, in an instant. "This concept [of involuntary memory] bears the trace of the situation that engendered it" (SW 4 316). The past that never had a chance to live, if we follow Benjamin, lives on as traces in the fragile

density of some material objects or in the sensation that it arouses in us “though we have no idea which one it is. And whether we come upon this object before we die, or whether we never encounter it, depends entirely on chance” (SW 4 315). The chance of involuntary memory to which Proust refers here in a tone of private despair is, in Benjamin’s formulation, the messianic instant that arrests the empty continuum of voluntary memory, “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (Thesis XVII).

The astounding weight of Proust’s work consists in the fact that it is not so much a remembrance of the past as it was lived and experienced as, rather, a weaving of memory. This is what Benjamin says in “On the Image of Proust.” Proust’s work, as Benjamin reads it, is a dialectical “web” – “The Latin word *textum* means “web” (SW 2 238) – of remembering and forgetting. “Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust’s *memoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory” (SW 2 238)? In Benjamin’s fascinating expression, the Proustean weaving of memory is “a Penelope work of forgetting” (SW 2 238). But it is also a counterpart to Penelope’s work rather than its likeness: “For here the day unravels what the night has woven” (SW 2 238). With the night come not the events of life, but “an everyday hour.” With the night unfolds the most fleeting, “weakest hour” of lost time. This is what joins Proust to the art of storytelling. We read in “The Storyteller”: “The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled” (SW 3 149). In the nighttime of “listening,” then, the self (the “dummy” of purposiveness of day time) is loosened and forgotten in the passivity (web of weakest hour) of immemorial. What emerges in the night is the web of “memory” of the immemorial woven by forgetting. In such a Proustean web, Benjamin has discovered “the bridge to the dream.” “No synthetic interpretation of Proust can disregard it” (SW 2 239). Let us follow Benjamin’s “synthesis” more closely.

Involuntary memory has the structure of dream, and, like dream, it is a world of opaque resemblances. The experience of similarity that we have in our wakeful state, the domain of voluntary memory, reflects only superficially “the deeper similarity of the dream world in which everything that happens appears not in identical but in similar guise, opaquely similar to itself” (SW 2 239). This should suggest, let us note, a crucial, yet only initial, similarity between involuntary memory and Benjamin’s historical

materialism. If “historiography in the strict sense is thus an image taken from involuntary memory,”³¹ then historiographic image shows the past in its non-identity with the present. Whereas “historicism offers the “‘eternal image’ of the past,” the image of eternal identity of things, “historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past” (Thesis XVI), a unique experience of non-identity. But this is only the first move of Benjamin’s articulation of the *dialectic* of remembering and forgetting. Whereas our purposive recollection of daytime, of “waking consciousness,” offers us only images of empty (in)experience, the “forgetting” of night time, of “dream consciousness,” weaves a web of images of deeper resemblances. In the “forgetting” of spontaneous recollection, “the eye perceives a complementary experience – in the form of its spontaneous afterimage, as it were” (SW 4 314). In the second move, however, Benjamin makes a second crucial reversal of the earlier reversal. “Proust,” Benjamin reminds us, “finally turns his day into nights, devoting all his hours to undisturbed work in his darkened room with artificial illumination, so that none of those intricate arabesques might escape him” (SW 2 238). “Proust did not give in to sleep” (SW 2 239). The *work* of involuntary memory – and historical materialism – cannot be the self-forgetfulness that once characterized the community of listeners to stories in the days of weaving and spinning. Proust’s method, Benjamin says, is not contemplation but actualization. With alert *attentiveness* (the mark of voluntary memory), Proust actualized the element of dream consciousness in *another* waking consciousness. The actualization is dialectical, because here the “presence of mind” is predicated on its initial absence and the time lag in which memories interact in the unconscious. We read in *The Arcades Project*:

Realization of dream element in the course of waking up is the canon of dialectics. It is paradigmatic for the thinker and binding for the historian. (N4, 4)

Actualization is dialectical, as it is less akin to “daydreaming” than to the consciousness of an insomniac. For actualization, strictly speaking, is not only a realization of “what has been from time immemorial” in an instant, but, more critically, it is a recognition of the image *as* a particular image, in and for the instant. “Proust,” Benjamin writes, “could not get his fill of emptying the dummy, his self, at one stroke in order to keep garnering that third thing, the image” (SW 2 240). Actualization, Benjamin seems to

³¹ Wohlfarth, “On the Messianic Structure,” 163.

suggest, is no longer the dream moment of non-identity, but rather the actual recognition of non-identity, which we can properly call *determinate* non-identity, “the one in which humanity, rubbing its eye, recognizes just this particular dream image as such” (N4, 1). The double, split recognition of the immemorial in the “flash” of an image *and* of the image as an image introduces dissymmetry to the core of actualization and brings the moment of recognition to a “standstill.” In this sense, the “image is dialectics at a standstill” (N3, 1). “For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression, but image, suddenly emergent” (N2a, 3).

In a crucial passage in *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin deploys the term “awakening” to describe this moment of non-identity. Awakening, according to Benjamin, is “the synthesis of dream consciousness (as thesis) and waking consciousness (as antithesis)” (N3a, 3). But, then the dialectical synthesis does not amount to a supra-identity of identity (waking consciousness) and non-identity (dream consciousness). Rather, as *determinate* non-identity, it constitutes, in Benjamin’s description, “life’s supremely dialectical point of rupture” (N3a, 3). “Thus, in Proust, the importance of staking an entire life on life’s supremely dialectical point of rupture: awakening. Proust begins with an evocation of the space of someone waking up” (N3a, 3). Awakening is a constellation of double, dissymmetric, recognition that makes the moment both a realization of a “dream” and waking up *from* a dream. In other words, awakening is realization of the dream as a dream *image*.

The double, split recognition introduce *historicity* into the moment of actualization. Distinguishing his project from Louis Aragon’s automatic writing, Benjamin writes: “Whereas Aragon persists within the realm of dream, here the concern is to find the constellation of awakening. While in Aragon there remains an impressionistic element, namely the ‘mythology’... here it is a question of the dissolution of ‘mythology’ into the space of history” (N1, 9). In several important passages in *The Arcades Project*, the synthetic moment of awakening is identified with the “‘now of recognizability,’ in which things put on their true –surrealist–face” (N3a, 3). The dual, dialectical, character of the now of awakening – the constellation of immemorial, as a *whole*, ‘mediated’ by a historically specific image – brings the moment to a standstill, crystallizes it into what Benjamin most ambiguously calls a “dialectical image.” The dialectical image is an image in which is constellated, differentially, the vision of the image and the image *as* image. A certain “internal” resistance to the image is what is

constitutive of the dialectical image. In other words, in a dialectical image, the image exceeds the vision of the image, tears itself away from itself. Benjamin describes the dialectical image as “the caesura in the movement of thought. Its position is naturally not an arbitrary one. It is to be found, in a word, where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest” (N10a, 3).

Dialectical image, Benjamin writes, is “genuinely historical – that is, not archaic – image” (N3, 1). We will see the position of the image in Benjamin’s concept of historicity in the next section. Suffice it here to note that, in Benjamin, the historicity of the image lies in its indexicality or figurality, rather than in its relation to essence. The image functions as a *temporal* index only when there exists a non-identity between the past and the present. The image is not an index for the past “the way it really was,” i.e. its identity, but for the past’s essential difference. In this precise sense, “The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption” (Thesis II). On the other hand, and more crucially, the image as a temporal index is synchronic with every present (N3, 1). The image, so to speak, releases the non-identity of the present. The dialectical image is an imagistic – thus determinate – spacing of non-identity itself. As a figure of non-identity, the image is dialectical and genuinely historical.

“The image of Proust,” Benjamin writes, “is the highest physiognomic expression which the irresistibly growing discrepancy between literature and life was able to assume” (SW 2 237). The image of Proust does not reconcile, but synchronizes the “discrepancy” between poetry and life, between image and experience. As synchronization of the non-synchronous, of the non-identical, the image of Proust is a dialectical match for the modern.

Toward an Ethico-political History and the Subject

It is my contention that in Proust, Benjamin finds the historiographic form that is adequate to the temporal structure of the experience of the modern. Materialist historiography responds to the time lag that structures the modern experience precisely by dialectically transfiguring that retroactivity into the “afterimage” of the past. And this transfiguration that the history writer sets as his task constitutes the present as what Benjamin calls the now-time.

In a brief reflection on Benjamin in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Slavoj Žižek points to the distinction between the method of hermeneutics and

Benjamin's historical materialism. Whereas the fundamental guidance of hermeneutics is to situate the singularity of an event or a text in the totality of the historical epoch, Benjamin's historical materialism, in contrast, *isolates* a specific work from the totality and continuity of history.³² I shall return to the particular method of isolation, which belongs to Benjamin's concept of allegory, shortly. But the distinction in method can only be explained by the broader dissymmetry between the two different modes of temporality: the homogeneous, empty time proper to historicism, and the de-totalizing now-time of historical materialism. Homogeneous and empty time might refer to the traditional philosophical, Aristotelian, concept of time as a homogeneous and uniform series of now-points, which dominated the philosophical tradition including Kant and Hegel. But, more crucially, homogeneous and empty time should remind us of Marx's exposition of the time of capital in *Capital*. The abstract time of value, according to Marx, is homogeneous and empty quantification. Modern historicism inherits this concept. Now, what marks the difference between historicism and historical materialism is the decisive *articulation* of the present. From the perspective of historicism, the present is an empty point in a series, in the infinite, boundless perfectibility of mankind, which it calls progress. The time of progressive history is "a homogeneous and empty time" (Thesis XIII), whether conceived of as an empty sequence of instants, or a homogeneous, even ecstatic, duration of past, present and future. "Historicism [which] rightly culminates in universal history" (Thesis XVII) is accumulative; it accumulates, as its data, the spoils of past successes and triumphs. In this continuous and progressive time frame, the present is always a transition. It is a hollowed-out space, or, more properly, a non-space. But, for a materialist history writer, as for the writer of involuntary memory, revolutionary historical time is a time "in its most real – that is, intertwined – form" (SW 2 244). Time, in its most real, is convoluted and space-bound. Whereas the historicist hermeneutics leans towards totalization, the historical materialist conception of the present is interruptive and de-totalizing. That does not mean that Benjamin's concept of history ignores mediation but, as we will see shortly, takes mediation to its extreme in the form of monadic now-time. To continue, whereas historicism places every event within an ideal time frame of history, and thereby empties out the singular spatiality of event, historical materialism presents a spacing of time. There is thus a fundamental dissymmetry between historical evolutionism and historical materialism:

³² Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 137–38.

The historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time takes a stand [*einsteht*] and has come to a standstill. For this notion defines the very present in which he himself is writing history. (Thesis XVI)

The interruptive notion of the present, which is not a transition, which is sundered from the infinite process and thus resistant to its totalization, has its ground in a vigilant consciousness “that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (Thesis VIII). Benjamin’s historical materialism accords with this insight. Its task then is to “bring about a real state of emergency” (Thesis VIII). It was this historical insight, Benjamin hoped, that could offer a concept adequate to resist the progress of the Nazi catastrophe. But this is precisely what distinguishes historical materialism from the social democratic apotheosis of progress. Benjamin thus directs his sharpest, Marxist, criticism at contemporary social democracy. It is in order to penetrate to the ground of the social democratic concept of progress, which speaks of progress of human kind, rather than class, and imagines progress as something boundless, that Benjamin articulates his critique of a “progression through a homogeneous, empty time” (Thesis XIII). It is the concept of homogeneous, empty time that enables social democracy to neutralize the event-ness that informs the Marxist conception of future. The future, in a social democratic doctrine, would be a realization and the end point of total historical process itself. Thus it is crucial for social democracy to neutralize the idea of the messianic time that, according to Benjamin, informs Marx’s idea of classless society. For historical materialism, the present is the site of messianic time, as an interruption, as a discontinuity. But, as Benjamin writes, when social democracy elevated this idea into an “ideal” then the trouble began (SW 4 401). The ideal was articulated in the neo-Kantian doctrine as an “infinite task.” “Once the classless society had been defined as an infinite task, the empty and homogeneous time was transformed into an anteroom, so to speak, in which one could wait for the emergence of the revolutionary situation with more or less equanimity” (SW 4 402). Against this equanimity Benjamin seeks to restore “a genuinely messianic face” to classless society. The classless society, Benjamin alerts us, must not be conceived as the final goal of historical process. But, “as frequently miscarried, ultimately [*endlich*] achieved interruption” (SW 4 402), the classless society, Benjamin would contend, belongs to the *singularity* of the now-time.

Historical materialism seeks to rescue the singularity of the historical object from the totalizing continuum of history. This distinguishes Benjamin’s aim and method not only from the Hegelian Marxist project of

historical totalization *a la* Lukács and Sartre but also, we want to argue, from Heidegger's project of historical repetition which apparently resembles Benjamin's method. The aim and method of detotalization stem from a vigilant political sense and invest the political with an ethical significance.

Before returning to the force-field of Benjamin's historical materialism it may be in order to discuss briefly his method of allegory as it remains his interpretive tool in what he calls historical actualization. We have already referred to the distinction, especially the temporal distinction, Benjamin makes, in his book on the baroque plays, between allegory and symbol. Unlike symbol, allegory, as Benjamin rearticulates it, accords with the sensibility and experience of the modern. Allegory is an expression of the reified world where things have been utterly sundered from meanings, from genuine human existence. As Fredric Jameson writes, "Allegory is ... the privileged mode of our own life in time, a clumsy deciphering of meaning from moment to moment, the painful attempt to restore a continuity to heterogeneous, disconnected instants."³³ In the baroque plays, the allegorical physiognomy of history is present not so much in the form of eternal life as that of irresistible decay. "In the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune.... The false appearance of totality is extinguished."³⁴ Further, "Allegories are in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things."³⁵ These consciously constructed layers of ruins have significance for the allegorist himself, or, to be more correct, the allegorist himself projects significance to the ruins. The allegorist, Benjamin writes, mortifies work, detaches it from the life-context in order to *re-signify* the work. We read:

If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power. That is to say, it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. He places it within it, and stands behind it; not in a psychological sense but in the ontological sense. In his hand the object becomes something different and for him it becomes a key to the realm of hidden knowledge.... This is what determines the character of allegory as a form of writing.³⁶

³³ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 72.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1977), 176.

³⁵ Benjamin, *The Origin*, 178.

³⁶ Benjamin, *The Origin*, 183–84.

Re-signification through isolating and fragmenting the object is the technique of the avant-garde (non-organic) modernist art works as well, the technique of montage, for example. Peter Burger has suggested, in his influential work *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, that it was Benjamin's intimate experience of the avant-gardiste works of his time that enabled him to develop allegory as a category and apply it to the baroque plays.³⁷ Burger especially mentions two components of the allegorical method: the isolating of one element out of the totality of the life-context and joining the isolated elements in a newly posited meaning context.³⁸ Without going into the detail of Burger's application of Benjamin's concept of allegory to the avant-garde (non-organic) art work, we can say that Burger's discussion of the allegorical method reemphasizes what Benjamin himself practiced in his method of actualization. Benjamin's history is avant-gardiste in not only its aim but also in its method.

The avant-gardism of Benjamin's historical materialism is most evident in its critical, essentially ethico-political, stance on what is called tradition. Whereas an irreversible and progressive view of history compels the historian to preserve tradition as a cultural treasure and thereby empathize with the victors of the past and the present, historical materialism approaches tradition with cautious detachment. The empathetic preservation of the tradition not only ignores "the anonymous toil of others" in the production of those "treasures" and the barbarism that taints the lineage of its cultural transmission (Thesis VI), but necessarily entails the suppression of the other past.³⁹ The forces of historical materialism "brush history against the grain" (Thesis VI) in order to *rescue* the other, suppressed, past from the progressive totalization of history. "The historical construction is dedicated to the memory of the anonymous" (SW 4 406). Now, if these forces of historical materialism sunder the present from the infinite process and "make the continuum of history explode" is the present then to be conceived in utterly ahistorical terms? If not, then to what kind of temporality and historicity is Benjamin pointing?

A view of the present not as transition and progression, but as disjuncture, defines the temporality of now-time. To be sure, now-time is not the present in any simple sense of an indifferent now-point. Rather, it is a

³⁷ Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 68.

³⁸ Burger, *Avant-Garde*, 69.

³⁹ In the editor's note to "On the Concept of History," we read that Benjamin's word for "oppressed past" translates "unterdrückte Vergangenheit," which also suggests "suppressed past" (SW 4 400).

certain dialectical *presentation* of the present. The historian finds the now-time to be what Benjamin calls a “historical object.” This presentation is a constellation of a particular past, the *other* past, and the struggling present. In this historical object the historian recognizes the sign or the trace of the messianic time. We read in Thesis XVII:

Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, It gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallized as a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical object only where it confronts him as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a messianic arrest of happening.” (Thesis XVII)

The thinker does not *voluntarily* recall the constellation. It *confronts* the thinker, as it were, from outside of his schema of (voluntary) memory. It belongs to the *other* past. Its arrival is unexpected and involuntary. But thinking then gives that shock a retroactive shock which isolates and crystallizes the constellation into a monad. The monad is the spaced-time of the unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant*, and that is why it is transient, which introduces a disjuncture in the very presence of the present and bears the *trace* of the messianic time. The absolute *arrivant* awakens the memory *of* the anonymous others suppressed in the great narratives of human progress.

Strictly speaking, as we have suggested above, the now-time (the now of awakening) is a configuration of two different dynamics of time: the messianic and the historical. It is messianic because, as an allegorical signification, it “transubstantiates” the immemorial as a *whole* into “one single catastrophe” (original-history), in order to redeem history as a *whole*. It is historical as it is always the now of a particular (historical) recognizability. The configuration of two temporalities thus remains dissymmetric. The dissymmetry is evident in the dissymmetry of optics depicted in Thesis IX: “Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* [the angel of history] sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet” (Thesis IX). The now-time, in spite of being a paradigmatic constellation of now and then, remains transient and incomplete. If the now-time is the time of rescue, then the rescue “can operate solely for the sake of what in the next moment is irretrievably lost” (N9, 7). It is for this reason that Benjamin can think of the now-time as the site of the *weak* messianic. The *weakness* of the messianic only increases the urgency of the now-time.

It is tempting to see the “angel of history” (Klee’s *Angelus Novus*) as the Messiah: “His face is turned toward the past,” and he sees one single

catastrophe. But there is no *futural* prophecy in Benjamin's description.⁴⁰ [In "Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History,"" Benjamin reflects on Friedrich Schlegel's saying that the historian is a prophet facing backward. Benjamin suggests that the saying can be interpreted to mean that "the historian turns his back on his own time, and his seer's gaze is kindled by the peaks of earlier generations as they sink further and further into the past. Indeed, the historian's own time is far more distinctly present to this visionary gaze than it is to the contemporaries who "keep step with it" (SW 4 405).] The angel "would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Thesis IX). But there remains a temporal dissymmetry, a time lag, between the motion of the angel and *this* profane historical world. The storm blowing from paradise "has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky" (Thesis IX). But in the space of the time lag is located the historian himself whose task it is to *actualize*, following the sign of the Messiah, the immemorial in the specific present. The struggling, the oppressed class itself, as "the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of the generations of the downtrodden" (Thesis XII), is located in the interface of the messianic and the historical. Under the sign of the Messiah, carrying the trace of the messianic time, the now-time is the time of historical actualization. Historical actualization, as opposed to progression in homogeneous time, is the founding concept of historical materialism (N2, 2). Actualization signifies genuine progress insofar as progress means, in Benjamin's radical definition, interference in the "continuity of elapsing time" (N9a, 7).

Actualization is the work of repetition.⁴¹ But for the historian of the oppressed, there cannot be such a thing as retrieval [*Wiederholung*] of the essence of the past. An empathic "reconstruction" of the past, "which despairs of appropriating the genuine historical image as it briefly flares up," Benjamin critically reminds us, always ends up empathizing with the victor (Thesis VII). Repetition that defines the materialist historiography is a repetition *and* the first time, a repetition sundered from the notion of the empty progression of time. Repetition *and* the first time, I want to emphasize the point, is a constellation, a montage in the strict sense, in

⁴⁰ For an insightful discussion of prophecy in Benjamin's thought, see chapter 1 of Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁴¹ For a rhetorical discussion of the historical repetition in Benjamin, see, Ian Balfour, 'Reversal, Quotation (Benjamin's History),' *Modern Language Notes* 106 (1991): 622–47.

which the new is produced and is *excessive* of the repetition. I will come back to this point shortly.

In "On the Concept of History," Benjamin defines repetition as "the tiger's leap into the past" (Thesis XIV). As a *leap*, repetition terminates the temporal continuity between the past and the present. Repetition, thus, has to be strictly distinguished from gazing *purely* into the past "without involving in this retrospective glance anything that has taken place in the meantime" (N7, 5). An event becomes historical, attains its historical actuality posthumously. As Benjamin writes, "[b]ut no state of affairs having causal significance is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years" (Thesis, supplement A). The time of actualization/repetition is thus a convoluted time, as opposed to an *identical*, boundless line of time. Rather than being a retrieval of the essence of the past, repetition, if I may assert it once again, synchronizes part of the past and the present instant in a singular, non-synchronous constellation. Not only did ancient Rome become charged with "the time of the now" in the French Revolution, and thus become something entirely different from "the way it really was," but also the French Revolutionaries saw themselves as resurrected Romans when they created something entirely new. Repetition *relates* the "past" and the "present" through *difference*. Revolutionary repetition, Benjamin would argue, following Marx or Blanqui, is a theatre, a costume drama. But, more importantly perhaps, underneath the theatrical masks, the event *of* repetition, the historical event, becomes a "force field in which the confrontation between its fore-history and its after-history is played out" (N7a, 1).

At this point, let me refer briefly to Heidegger's concept of historical repetition in order to mark the difference between Benjamin's concept of actualization and Heidegger's historical repetition despite, perhaps because of, important similarities between the two. Benjamin himself distinguishes his project of actualization from Heidegger's phenomenological retrieval: "What distinguishes images from the "essences" of phenomenology is their historical index. (Heidegger seeks in vain to rescue history for phenomenology abstractly through "historicity")" (N3, 1). Like Benjamin, Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, thinks of authentic historicity as distinct from the time conceived as a homogeneous and uniform series. Historicity and tradition, according to Heidegger's thinking, should also be distinguished from any accumulative gathering. Heidegger grounds the "essential constitution of historicity" in Dasein's originary temporal structure of care which is revealed, existentially, that is, in Dasein's

anticipatory resoluteness. An authentic resolution, which, in repeating, makes possible something like heritage (authentic having-been), is essentially futural (BT 352). There is a circular movement in Dasein's resolute repetition. In projecting upon its ownmost possibilities Dasein comes back to itself. This is what Heidegger precisely means by the process of explicitly handing itself down to itself. But, this is Heidegger's important rejoinder: repetition does not actualize what was already an actual possibility. Repetition retrieves the other possibility. Repetition is a *response* to the possibility that has-been-there. Here is Heidegger's argument:

The handing down of a possibility that has been in retrieving it, however, does not disclose the Dasein that has been there in order to actualize it again. The retrieve of what is possible neither brings back "what is past," nor does it bind the "present" back to what is "outdated." Arising from a resolute self-projection, retrieve is not convinced by "something past," in just letting it come back as what was once real. Rather, retrieve *responds* to the possibility of existence that has-been-there. (BT 352)

Repetition, in this strong sense, is productive of the new, which comes close to Benjamin's concept of actualization. Yet, in Heidegger, authentic repetition makes existential-ontological *totalization* possible. Does not repetition, as the moment of Dasein's being-totality (essence), seek to restore the deeper continuity of history? The term "destiny," which is Heidegger's term for authentic historicity, points to this deeper continuity. Benjamin's historical repetition, on the other hand, is detotalizing and even deontologizing. What is distinct about Benjamin's actualization is its constructivism which, as an avant garde principle *par excellence*, *isolates* the singular image from the life-context or the being-totality and constellates the image in a monadic singular-universal. The construction presupposes destruction (the isolation and fragmentation of object). The determinant in Benjamin's de-constructive work of actualization is not the future possibility but the present instant. "It is the present that polarizes the event into fore- and after-history" (N7a, 8).

Let me cite an important passage from *The Arcades Project*, to which I referred earlier in the context of Heidegger. The passage is worth quoting almost in its entirety as it offers the best summing up of Benjamin's method of actualization.

What distinguishes images from the "essences" of phenomenology is their historical index.... These images are to be thought of entirely apart from the categories of the "human sciences," from so-called habitus, from style, and the like. For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a

particular time. And, indeed, this acceding “to legibility” constitutes a specific critical point in the movement at their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each “now” is the now of particular recognizability. It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other word: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural (*bildlich*). (N3, 1)

What concerns the historian is not the temporal essence of history, which is the stuff of universal history, but rather the monadic singularity of the now-time. However, the monadological structure of the now-time – its interiority – that the historian blasts out of historical succession is determined *not* arbitrarily by the historian but by the necessary indexical recognizability of the image. That image, as we read in the above citation, is synchronic with the present day and releases the present from the historical succession. The image (its acceding to legibility) belongs to the involuntary memory of the struggling class. It is to be found where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest (N10a, 3). The extracted historical object is therefore itself a dialectical image. What is dialectical is that “the historical object finds represented in its interior its own fore-history and after-history” (N10a, 3). In an earlier fragment Benjamin defines the historical event as a force-field where the *confrontation* between the fore-history and the after-history takes place. In the extracted monadic structure is thus represented all the forces and interests of history on a reduced scale (N10, 3).

What distinguishes the constructive principle from, say, Heidegger’s phenomenology is that in the former the structure of relation that constitutes the interior of the monadic historical object is not a temporal relation but figural. In a figural relation temporality is suspended. The image is frozen in a standstill. It is thanks to his avant-garde insight that Benjamin refuses to submit the *figural* relation to the relation of essence (N3, 1). When the relation of the part of the past and the present instant is thought as figural then it is possible for the historian, as allegorist, to extract the monad from the continuum of history and invest it with the meaning of the now. This is the work of montage in the strict sense, where the relation is indexical rather than essential. In Benjamin’s conception of the dialectical image, an image *exceeds*, as singular, any temporal schema of representation or even ‘historical’ referent so to speak. This excess of image over representation constitutes the image as figure (and thus historical) in

the first place. This exceeding, singular, image refers to the other past, the entirely other. Benjamin argues that because of the indexical relation of fore-history and after-history there is, for the historian, no appearance of repetition in history. In an important passage we read:

For the materialist historian, every epoch with which he occupies himself is only prehistory for the epoch he himself must live in. And so, for him, there can be no appearance of repetition [*wiederholung*] in history, since precisely those moments in the course of history which matter most to him, by virtue of their index as “fore-history,” become moments of the present day and change their character according to the catastrophic or triumphant nature of that day. (N9a, 8)

But the repetition to which we refer is not the repetition of the identical. Repetition *modifies* what is repeated and produces something new, insofar as it is the present, being itself determined by the legibility of the image, that “determines where, in the object from the past, that object’s fore-history and after-history diverge so as to circumscribe its nucleus” (N11, 5). In other words, since the present is the singular site of repetition, repetition takes place “always anew, never in the same way” (N7a, 1). There is thus no *appearance* of repetition in history. If we may attempt to articulate it more rigorously, *each* “now” is actualization and articulation of “what has been” (the same) *as* new, as opposed to new as the same.

It is in this context that I wish to return to Benjamin’s historiographic project of rearticulating the unity of two forms of memory: a unity of the reminiscences of *many*, and the remembrance of *one*. One might be tempted to read Benjamin’s couching of the monadic now, as a modern form of *Eingedenken*, as another attempt to salvage the whole through its embodiment in a part itself, a dialectical fusion of eternity and time – a holistic recollection (*Erinnerung*). Our discussion, above, points to the opposite conclusion. If now-time, as a *model* of messianic time, “comprises the entire history of mankind in a tremendous abbreviation” (Thesis XVIII), then that cannot mean that now-time preserves the whole of the past in the present, as Benjamin seems to suggest in Thesis XVII. *Eingedenken* will bespeak an uncritical hypostatization “as soon as it becomes the signature of historical process *as a whole*” (N13, 1) Benjaminian *Eingedenken* marks a progress not because it represents tradition as a whole, but because it, as avant garde, *isolates* the monadic, and necessarily non-synchronous constellation (“where the tension between the dialectical opposites is greatest”) from the whole. Ultimately, the now is “the fissure” within the tradition (N9, 4).

Historical materialism must renounce the epic element in history. It blasts the Epoch out of the reified "continuity of history." But it also explodes the homogeneity of the epoch, interspersing it with ruins – that is with the present. (N9a, 6)

The now-time *presents* the present as an impossible spacing of ruins of time itself. The excess of image over representation, of sign over essence, is also the spacing of this ruin.

The destructive character sees no image hovering before him. He has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what has been destroyed. First of all, for a moment at least, empty space, the place where the thing stood or the victim lived. Someone is sure to be found who needs this space without occupying it." (SW 2 541)

The "empty" space is the measure of the subjectivity of "the subject of historical knowledge." The point I wish to make is that Benjamin's historical materialism, which is non-essentialist in the strict sense, requires an articulation of subjectivity which would be otherwise than essence. Now, it is not my point that in Benjamin the subjectivity of the revolutionizing class is couched in necessarily Levinasian terms. Nonetheless, I wish to assert that Benjamin's historical materialism implicitly offers a notion of subjectivity which is post-deconstructive.

In the context of the historical materialism, we have to think of the question of subjectivity on two levels: the revolutionizing class and the historian. The historian and the writer (as producer), Benjamin would not hesitate to argue, represent the *interest* of the revolutionizing class. The word interest, however, needs to be thought in the *transformative* sense, which would then put in question interest conceived in the self-preserving sense of the term, in so far as the class, in question, both for Marx and Benjamin, is the self-abolishing class. The historian and the writer identify with the transformative 'interest' of the class. It is this identification with the transfiguring dynamics of the class that makes the historian's work avant-gardiste.

The avant-gardiste constructivism of the historian, in contrast to the "reconstruction" which is empathic, presupposes "destruction" (N7, 6). The destructive work is essentially ethico-political as it is dedicated to the memory of the anonymous, as the historian brushes history against the grain of the "tradition" itself. "The destructive character stands in the front line of traditionalists. Some people pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them; others pass situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter are called the destructive" (SW 2 542).

If Benjamin's description of the subject is couched in a dialectical language, then that should not lead us to see the revolutionizing class as the Subject-Object of History *a la* Lukács. Benjamin's natural historical perspective would call into question such expressivist conception of the Subject of historical totality. Nonetheless, the subject, in question, is the *historical* subject. It is thus important, in this context, to reflect on the historicity of the subject. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin crucially suggests that the historical "understanding" is to be grasped, in principle, as an afterlife of that which is understood (N2, 3). Benjamin further suggests that what is recognized in the afterlife of "works" is to be considered as the foundation of history in general. The conception of the afterlife should have a crucial implication for the thinking of the subject. What Benjamin calls "the subject of historical knowledge" is, to use a rather clumsy expression, the after-subject in that it is marked by the trace of the *after*, in other words, by the *anachrony* that the temporality of the after designates. The subject is the *after*-subject, not in the sense of a dialectical self-recovery in the form of a "self-consciousness" through a detour of otherness, but as a certain *re-affirmation* of the time *of* the after. The after necessarily lingers in the reaffirmation. And that *re-affirmed* after makes the time of the subject "dialectical" and its time a stand still time, as opposed to a continuous progression (N2a, 3).

The point I wish to make is that Benjamin couches the dialectics in a non-Hegelian manner. The non-Hegelian trait is preserved in his conception of constellation. The idea of constellation suggests that the dialectics, in Benjamin's ambiguous articulation, retains a certain disparateness in its synthesis. As a consequence, there is an irreducible *heterogeneity* in the time of the subject, non-self-identity (of identity), and a certain non-contemporaneity that resist its totalization in a neat dialectical order. There is an insurmountable ambiguity in the subjectivity of the revolutionizing class in that the class, instead of consolidating itself, is in the process of self-abolition. In a certain sense, the class, in the process of self-abolition, generalizes "alienation," which dismantles the the identity.

Let me reaffirm the point that there is a persistence of involuntariness (passivity) in the subjectivity of the class. Historiography, in the strict sense, is an image taken from involuntary memory of the revolutionizing class. Even though Benjamin strictly articulates memory in dialectical terms Benjamin's "dialectic" of the voluntary and the involuntary memory, as we have argued, does not operate according to the logic of totalization. There is an essential non-synchronicity in Benjamin's articulation of the dialectic of the voluntary and the involuntary memory, in his synthesis

of the dream and the waking, which distinguishes his project not only from the dialectical project of Lukács but also from the ontological hermeneutics of Heidegger. Benjamin's historical materialism is *traced* through the involuntary memory. The revolutionizing class, as the avant-garde subject, gathers its power to situate itself in the non-contemporaneous time of the in-voluntary, in the heterogeneity of the now.

PART THREE

POSTCOLONIAL SINGULAR-UNIVERSAL:
ETHICAL SUBJECT AND HISTORY

CHAPTER FOUR

POSTCOLONIAL IRONY: TIME, SUBJECT, AND HISTORY IN THE CRITICAL WRITINGS OF WILSON HARRIS

Wilson Harris's thought is a remarkable response to the trans-national relations that we associate with the term globalization. I use the term response in the strong sense of a critique. It would be crucial to see Harris's critique of the trans-national relations as affirmative. The complex cross-culturalism that defines Harris's original postcolonial thinking is a critique of the abstract model of universalism that the capitalist globalization requires. The abstract universalism, Harris would maintain, cannot be dissociated from the catastrophic consequences of imperialism: genocide, destruction of nature and human habitus, development of reified, capitalist, subjectivity. But the critique of the abstract universalism also leads Harris to criticize its 'other' – xenophobic nationalism and racial fundamentalism. For Harris, the abstract universalism and the cultural exclusivism consolidate each other. Harris responds to the consolidating economy of the same through his innovative phenomenology of the singular-universal, which offers an irreducibly ironic perspective to Harris's postcolonial phenomenology.

The thought of the singular-universal is articulated, in Harris, through a crucial conception of passage (temporal passage) which is the essential aspect of Harris's phenomenology. The (postcolonial) passage is the match for the abstract universalism of capitalist globalization. As I shall argue, the concept of passage, in Harris, is inextricably tied to an ethical conception of the host subject of history as Harris's conception of passage and transfiguration requires all the resources of the host subject who is the subject *for* the other.

Ironic Scale of Dwelling and Subject

Any discussion of Harris's thinking must begin with *and*, in Harris's word, *arrive in* his phenomenological conception of dwelling. A singular conception of dwelling is articulated through a complex phenomenology of space. Harris poses the question of dwelling in the singular term: what is the scale, the measure of dwelling? In our reading of Harris, that

measure must be thought as *temporal* measure, which is otherwise than what Harris calls the “static clock” of colonial time.¹ The expression static clock describes what Harris terms the model of *consolidation* that “crushes all into the time of conquest” (SEWH, 179). In his justly famous essay, “Tradition and the West Indian Novel,” Harris shifts the perspective from the one that shows the West Indian as “minority in the world of the twentieth century” to “what in my view is remarkable about the West Indian in depth is a sense of subtle links, the series of subtle and nebulous links which are latent within him, the latent ground of old and new personalities.”² There is thus a shift of terrain, a remarkable change of perspective from the model of consolidation to what Harris calls the art of fulfillment (Tradition, 28). The latter belongs to the singularity of dwelling, the singularity that resists being subsumed within an abstract notion of universality but is akin to the dimension of what I would like to call the singular-universal.

The idea of tradition, when thought in accordance with the model of consolidation, Harris would suggest, implies a foreignness, or even resistance, to the alterity of the other. “[T]he consequences – the holocaust, ethnic cleansing, institutional racism, the gross and terrible exploitation of native and aboriginal peoples – are so marked, so hideous, that I find myself wondering how they could be so totally dissociated from the ritual habits that inform our sensation of fixtures of tradition.”³ Even the great, canonical literature can contribute to a wrong notion of tradition. In several places Harris mentions that it was Dante’s failure of thinking in *The Divine Comedy* when Virgil who assisted Dante in penetrating the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* was barred from the *Paradiso*. Dante’s influence on Harris’s thought is immense. In spite, or perhaps because of, his admiration for Dante, Harris could link Dante’s outcasting of Virgil from “the womb of spirit” to “the slow but steady materialization of European imperial civilization.”⁴ According to Harris, the dominant tradition of European realism consolidates, at the figural level, the same failure. In “The

¹ Wilson Harris, *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. A.J.M. Bundy (London and New York: Routledge), 179. All further references to the volume will be parenthetically cited in the text as SEWH, followed by the page number.

² Wilson Harris, *Tradition the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon Publications), 28. All further references to the text will be parenthetically cited in the text as Tradition, followed by the page number.

³ Wilson Harris, “Resistance to alterities,” in *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, ed. Marco Fazzini (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004), 3.

⁴ Harris, “Resistance,” 5.

Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination,' Harris refers to the blinded, blindfolded, characters of *Antigone*. "All the characters in the play seem to have inherited a cloak over their eyes which they hold up in varying degrees as the flag of self-righteousness or conviction or hubris" (SEWH, 249). Poetical forms, if and when absolutised, enshrine the consolidation (as inheritance) of the thingified, blinded realism as an endemic fatality where *Hades is Hades is Hades forever and ever* (SEWH, 249).

It is Harris's well nigh paradigmatic point that the art of fulfillment is *discontinuous* with the model of consolidation and the chronological time characteristic of the latter. The art of fulfillment involves a *breach* in the time of consolidation, in the time of "sovereign violence." The fulfillment presents a new, in that sense synthetic, rather than tautological, constellation of time(s). The idea of constellation would prove to be crucial in our reading of Harris. I wish to remark, in advance, that the constellation, in Harris, does not transcend the breach in order to construct a totality, but arrives at what Harris would call a re-visionary and imaginative blending of the past and the future (through forward and backward movements) across a breach, a discontinuity, a rift. The (imaginative) constellation of time(s) is singular, which nonetheless needs plurality, or what Harris, employing a theatrical metaphor, would call "plural masks." Harris thus distinguishes the singularity (in his language, solitariness) from the egocentricity and aligns it with "an imaginary constellation... in order to steep oneself in a theatre, so to speak, of plural masks that bear on the travails of humanity" (SEWH, 185). To repeat, the singular-plural relationality needs to be couched in terms of the philosophical concept of singular-universal, which I seek to develop through a phenomenological reading of the motif of space in Harris's writings.

In her essay 'Approaching Wilson Harris's Creativity,' which serves as the Introduction to *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean*, Hena Maes-Jelenik, the distinguished commentator on Harris's fictions, states that "Wilson Harris's fiction is a unique literary achievement rooted in the Caribbean, the universal and... in the living cosmos."⁵ What Maes-Jelenik means by this is that this threefold root is actually one, the singular. In several places, Harris posits, in a manner which he terms the "insoluble paradox," the allegorical unity of the phenomenal environment of the Caribbean and the universal predicament of humanity. The

⁵ Hena Maes-Jelenik, "Approaching Wilson Harris's Creativity," in *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelenik and Benedicte Ledent (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), xi.

“insoluble paradox” is the mark of the singular-universal and can only be expressed in a perspective which Harris would not hesitate to call *epic*.

When Harris refers to the “extreme originality” of the phenomenal landscapes of the Caribbean and Guyana, which, it is interesting to recall, he first experienced as a river and land surveyor in the 1940s in the interior Guyana, he precisely draws attention to the idea that the “living cosmos” of the Caribbean contains “an absolute medium of consciousness which we must learn to accept as the language of art.”⁶ In his essay “The Music of Living Landscapes,” Harris writes:

It seems to me that, for a long time, landscapes and riverscapes have been perceived as passive, as furniture, as areas to be manipulated; whereas, I sensed, over the years, as a surveyor, that the landscape possessed resonance. The landscape possessed a life, because, the landscape, for me, is like an open book, and the alphabet with which one worked was all around me. But it takes some time to really grasp what this alphabet is, and the book of the living landscape is. (SEWH, 40)

It should also be mentioned that it is not only the living landscapes of Guyana but also its very mixed social environment that has influenced Harris’s cross-cultural imagination. As Harris writes, “Guyana is a remarkable wilderness. It has known Spanish settlers, then French and Dutch rule but became a British colony in the early nineteenth century. Its population is less than a million but encompasses peoples from every corner of the globe, Africa, India, China, Portugal” (SEWH, 41).

The language of art, inherent within the “living cosmos” of the Caribbean, expresses “the breakthrough of sensibility” which, Harris argues, “is fundamental to unity and originality and therefore to the truth of fiction in all ages, the underlying necessity of poetry or drama to occupy itself as a gateway between living and dead worlds, black and white habit or wake of memory.”⁷ In the essay “Quetzalcoatl And The Smoking Mirror: Reflections On Originality and Tradition,” Harris uses the fascinating expression “*transitive density*” to describe the phenomenal environment. We read: “[T]ransitive densities may instil themselves in fiction that is shaped in ‘the mind of the imaginative writer who has been deeply affected by the life of primordial landscapes, tall rapids, burning savannahs, rain-forest rocks imprinted with the markings of ancient cultures, markings

⁶ Wilson Harris, “The Phenomenal Legacy,” in *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966–1981*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek, Mündelstrup: Dangaroo, 1981, P. 47.

⁷ Harris, “The Phenomenal Legacy,” 46.

that resemble extra-human messages from the gods who write in fire and wind and water'" (SEWH, 186).

In reading Harris the reader confronts an impenetrable ambiguity and an irony that cannot be reduced. We will return to the irony later. The terms such as "transitive density" and "phenomenal" contain the ambiguity. Not only the outer, phenomenal, landscapes which Harris describes with infinite care, but the very phenomenal density of the text are transitive, as they are ambiguous, in that the texts offer bridges to the interiority of the world and to, Harris would not hesitate to say, a profound loneliness of the world. This phenomenal interiority, if we may say so, is the feature of what Harris, most originally, calls the *architecture of space*, to which I shall turn now. It needs to be mentioned that the idea of the architecture of space is inherently *temporal* and contains the possibility of transfiguration, which, for Harris, is the hallmark of epic.

The phenomenal environment of the Caribbean and the South America, according to Harris, is *asymmetric*.⁸ The singular-universality resists the symmetry of vision that characterizes the model of consolidation. I would further argue that the asymmetry, when conceived in the positive sense, offers an irreducibly *ironic* perspective to the phenomenality of dwelling and to the subjectivity of the native dweller. I should like to mention, parenthetically, that the concept of the nativity, in Harris, should not be confused with a conception of local. Harris writes: "Karl Marx, for example, was a profoundly native phenomenon. This meant that his resources went so deep they appeared obscure and embraced many contradictions to acquire universal application in the Western world. Many economic theses, however, which are easy to read have a pseudo-universal or local/insular application" (SEWH, 176). Let me cite an important passage where Harris describes the postcolonial divide and the transfiguring aspect of the phenomenal environment of the Caribbean in spatial terms:

For the mainstream of the West Indies in my estimation possesses an enormous escarpment down which it falls, and I am thinking here of the European discovery of the New World and conquest of the ancient American civilizations which were themselves related by earlier and obscure levels of conquest... This distinction is a large, a very large one which obviously has to be broken down into numerous modern tributaries and other immigrant movements and distinctions so that the smallest area one envisages, island or village, prominent ridge or buried valley, flatland or heartland, is charged immediately with the openness of imagination. (Tradition, 30–31)

⁸ Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press), 122.

The spatial transfiguration is then extended into a temporal or historical one: "It is in this light that one must seek to relate the existing pattern of each community to its *variable past*" (Tradition, 31 emphasis mine). The postcolonial, or, if we may use the word, the modern, divide, which is the chronological divide that the colonial 'time' consolidates, is thus the divide through which to enter into the realm of the temporal transfiguration. Herein lies the irony of the postcolonial predicament. What we are concerned with, in our reading, is precisely the temporal dimension of the irony.

Any reading of Harris has to come to terms with his conception of epic. Harris would differ from the position that it is impossible to write epic in the modern times. For Harris, epic, by definition, is always *yet* to come. There is an essential futurity to epic. In "Quetzalcoatl," Harris defines epic in temporal terms: "Epic is an *arrival* in an architecture of space that is *original* to our age, an *arrival* in multi-dimensionality that alerts us to some kind of transfiguration of appearances – in parallel with science and architecture – that implies energies akin to extra-human faculties inserted into the fabric of history" (SEWH, 187).⁹ Epic is an arrival (a temporal term) in the sense that it springs from the originality and the activation of primordial resources within a living language (SEWH, 187). Epic is an arrival in the transitive dimensionalities that unlock, in backward and forward movements, doors within language itself (SEWH, 187). Harris's reference to the extra-human dimension of the epic may suggest, as we will see, that the time of the epic, the epic dwelling, is the time *of* the entirely other.

I wish to reassert the point that in Harris's thinking time has precedence over the conception of space. Time is the reference, so to speak, of the *ironic scale*. The architecture of space is temporal in that it designates, through a subtle dialectic, a temporalising of space *and* a spacing of time. The phenomenality of time is, however, irreducibly fictional, which, Harris would insist, should be conceived as otherwise than realism. Marina Camboni succinctly describes the fictionality of time: "While claiming for the artist participation in "the unfinished genesis" of imagination in

⁹ Peter Hitchcock notes that Harris's conception of epic is not generic. Yet, referring to the relation between epic and novel in Harris, Hitchcock writes: "If we can speak of epic novels it is because the epic has been novelized, not reproduced. Thus, what Bakhtin articulates as novelization is not that far removed from the Aesthetic accentuation in Harris's use of "re-visionary" or what he describes in the Carnival Trilogy as "carnival evolution." On the terrain of genre Harris writes epics *as* novels, not epics." Peter Hitchcock, *The long space: transnationalism and postcolonial form* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 46–47.

worlds of space and nature and psyche, Harris advances the idea of a continuous creativity at play within a self-resisting fossilization of identities and oppositions, and expresses faith in the innovative potential of the past... Imagination's time is not a metaphysical eternity but physical infinity. Infinite time is time regained. As in chaos theory, a favourite with Harris, humans interact in physical time with plants, animals, earthscapes and skylscapes."¹⁰

The essential distinction Harris makes between realism and the phenomenality of fiction or fictional phenomenality "lies in an overlap of premises visualized, however imperfectly, within the 'void' of the latter – within the 'void' of a fiction of reality" (Tradition, 49–50). The 'void' Harris is pointing at is a temporal 'void,' the "insubstantial limits" of which is the *horizon* (in the phenomenological sense) of the phenomenality of dwelling. The 'void' as horizon – this is what offers the ironic perspective to Harris's phenomenology. Harris would argue that the (temporal) 'void' is the enigmatic core, the "*insoluble paradox*," of the phenomenal wholeness (SEWH, 252).¹¹ The paradox lies in the fact that the "wholeness of reality cannot exist except by confessing its own insubstantial limits, thereby invoking not only the horror of disorientation but an implosive compass of freedom as well within such insubstantial limits overlooked by prejudice from the microcosm of society and rejected equally by prejudice from the macrocosm of inanimate nature" (Tradition, 49). Indeed, the temporal 'void' is where space becomes intelligible, in the first place. "What I am saying," Harris writes, "may be expressed in another way (I now quote Giacometti): 'Sculpture is expression of space, which means that it can never be complete: to be complete is to be static'" (Tradition, 50). Referring to Harris's essay "Phenomenal Legacy," Mark A. McWatt describes Harris's reflection on space in modern sculpture, "where form and meaning depend upon both matter and its absence, the losses from the original block of material which are essential for the achievement of form. He also hints at the use of spaces within the material form – holes and hollows which, though they consist of 'nothing' are of vital importance to the meaning and nature of the work."¹² The idea of the 'void' of *spacing* would

¹⁰ Marina Camboni, "Resisting Fearful Symmetry: Wilson Harris's Bridges of Language," in *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, 14.

¹¹ Homi Bhabha crucially refers to Harris's conception of void in the textuality of colonial history in his (Bhabha's) theorization of the cultural dimension of the Third Space of enunciation. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 56.

¹² Mark A. McWatt, "Omens of Humanity": World Texts and Contexts in Wilson Harris's Critical Writings," in *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean*, 129.

lead to the affirmation of the cross-cultural 'void,' the cross-cultural "womb of space." Rather than being conceived as negative there is, in Harris's thinking, a certain *affirmation* of the 'void.' The affirmative sense of the 'void' is expressed, in Harris's fictions, by the figure of the sacred Jester: "Throughout my writing life I have sought to bring into play the certainties but above all the uncertainties in imaginative truth. I have sought to do this by various models of sacred Jest."¹³

It was C.L.R. James who, in his commentary on Harris's "Tradition and The West Indian Novel," drew attention to the resemblance between Harris and Heidegger (Tradition, 69–75). James refers to Heidegger in the context of Harris's conception of language. We will come to this shortly. But does Heidegger admit irony in his phenomenology? In *Being and Time* phenomenological horizon is revealed as ec-static time of being. The ec-static temporality, we attempted to argue, is a certain co-belonging of being and beyond being, which is expressed in Heidegger's remark that temporality "is" not being, but *temporalizes* itself. Is Harris's idea of the ironic horizon a *literary* analogue of this insight? Let me keep the question open. I wish to note that Harris's fascinating motif of the "womb of time" comes close to the conception of temporalizing *of* time in *Being and Time*.

Let me follow Harris's ironic phenomenology further. In a language reminiscent of Heidegger of "Building Dwelling Thinking" Harris speaks of *boundaries* of dwelling. Boundaries of habitat must not be conceived as fixed. "Boundaries are *sensitive*, however *partial* they actually are."¹⁴ Boundary, in Harris, is, strictly speaking, the temporal horizon that makes possible space in the first place. Boundaries, in this sense, are *measureless*. Harris projects the measurelessness of boundaries on a broader "life of the earth." "There is a measureless nature to the life of the earth in the midst of catastrophes, drought and famine and flood that we blindly invite..."¹⁵ The life of the earth is not fixed because the life of the earth cannot be dissociated from the characters that dwell on it. "The life of the earth needs to be seen *in fiction* as sensitively woven into the characters that move upon it, whose history, may I say, reflects a profound relationship to the earth, so that we may speak of humanity whose feet are made of mud or land or water or any other element to attune us to our being on an earth that moves as we move upon it."¹⁶ By the same token, the idea of the life of

¹³ Harris, "Resistance," 3.

¹⁴ Wilson Harris, 'Theatre of the Arts,' in *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris an the Caribbean*, 2.

¹⁵ Harris, "Theatre," 2.

¹⁶ Harris, "Theatre," 4.

the earth leads Harris to speak of the earth as the *other* of the human-centred cosmos. Both in his fictions and prose Harris writes of the extra-human layers in the life of the earth, of “the music of living landscape.” That music “is older than human discourse. When it arises, it arises in the shape of an unspoken prayer, a prayer without words.”¹⁷ The (ironic) boundaries of dwelling are, in the strict sense, extra-human and unsettle the hubris of a human-centred cosmos. Boundaries of the earth can thus be seen as akin to the ‘void,’ “the vulnerability,” by which to measure the dwelling. There is a “Wound of being and non-being we carry in ourselves.”¹⁸ The wound, the vulnerability that let us entry into the time of fulfillment is the wound of the *other*, the time of fulfillment being the *other time*. We will find confirmation of this reading in Harris’s conception of “vision of consciousness,” or of language as art of fulfillment.

As we have noted, the time of fulfillment is discontinuous with the time of consolidation. A breach, so to speak, belongs to the former. In ‘The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination,’ Harris refers to a sudden breach in the story-line in *Antigone*, when Antigone abandons the traditional and ritual plea and concentrates on her brother’s plight. “It is almost as if her brother is occultly alive and she is pleading for his life” (SEWH, 249). According to Harris, the breach in the story-line provides an “intuitive clue” to the “secret” return of other time. The fulfillment that Harris speaks of in opposition to the model of consolidation thus needs a *prior* breach in the continuity of time. “That breach constitutes a kind of subtle abyss in a story-line we take for granted” (SEWH, 250). In contrast to our normal reasoning, abyss, in Harris, is not to be conceived as a despairing fate. “*Abysmal* in the sense of the subtle abyss that lie between all partial models of tradition, subtle abysses that make strangeness into intimacy, intimacy into what is at first unrecognizable until one perceives there a medium of extraordinary re-visionary momentum and truth” (SEWH, 251). On a larger scale, the subtle abyss constitutes “the extreme originality” of the Caribbean and is like an “invisible text that secrets a corridor into the future” (SEWH, 249). The remark is significant in that the *vision* of consciousness that Harris defends contains within it, as its essential core, an *invisible* text.

In opposition to the model of consolidation, Harris draws attention to the open, ironic, imagination of the native dweller. The ironic imagination

¹⁷ Wilson Harris, “An Interview with Wilson Harris in Macerata,” in *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, 54.

¹⁸ Harris, “Theatre,” 8.

makes possible a transfiguration of the phenomenal divide, which is also the postcolonial divide, and lets the broken parts “act on each other in a manner which fulfils *in the person* the most nebulous instinct for a vocation of being and independent spirit within a massive landscape of apparent lifelessness which yields nevertheless the essential denigration and erosion of historical perspective” (Tradition, 31–32). This is not only the peculiarity of the West Indian question but also, as Harris insists, peculiar to every society “where minorities (frail in historical origin or present purpose) may exist, and comparatively new immigrant and racial cells sometimes find themselves placed within a dangerous misconception and upon a reactionary treadmill” (Tradition, 32). Transfiguration thus belongs to the other realm that Harris calls “vision of consciousness” (Tradition, 32). The latter is the peculiar, ironic, reality of language. “[L]anguage is one which transforms inner and outer formal categories of experience, earlier and representative modes of speech itself” (Tradition, 32). That is to say, language is the “medium” in which the divide of inner and outer, subject and object, seeing and hearing undergo constant *reversal*. In this sense, language or poetic language is much more than a question of intellectual usage or documentary coinage. Harris’s expression *vision* of language should not also mislead us to think of language as an optical imperative, which would then subsume language within the consolidation of vision. There is an essential invisibility rather in the vision of language.

Language, for Harris, is a medium of alterity. Harris’s insistence on the extreme drama of *consciousness* does not, however, mean subsumption of alterity in the *identity* of the subject. Rather, the *drama* of consciousness projects a figurative meaning upon the *de facto* historical climate (SEWH, 178). The drama of consciousness releases the time of alterity (of the other) from the time of the same. More correctly, the drama already presupposes that time of alterity. In a profoundly enigmatic manner, Harris calls this time of alterity (the *other time*) the fugitive time. We have seen the fugitivity of time in the breach of the story-line of *Antigone*, when Antigone appeals for her brother’s life. In an insightful interpretation of Edward Brathwaite’s remarkable poem, ‘Masks,’ Harris draws attention to the fugitivity of *time*. It is the *time* of the necessary reversal of sight and sound. Here is Brathwaite’s poem:

So the god,
masks of dreamers,
hears lightnings stammer,
hearts rustle

their secret
 blood shiver like leaves
 on his branches. Will
 the tree, god
 of path-
 ways, still
 guide us? Will
 your wood lips speak
 so we see?

The expression “hears lightnings/stammer” is, according to Harris, the fugitive line of the poem. There is “the echo of the drums ... implied there in association with the lightning that *stammers* across the sky” (SEWH, 178). “*Sound* becomes *sight* because of the fugitive boundaries of the drum, of the mask that allows for the breath and life of the icon” (SEWH, 179). That fugitive line, according to Harris, is also the *breathline* of the poem. “One must remember that *breath* is all the black man may have possessed at a certain stage in the Americas. He had lost his tribal tongue, he had lost everything except an abrupt area of space and lung; he possessed nothing but the calamitous air of broken ties in the New World” (SEWH, 179). Ironically, it is the *return* of the fugitive time, what Harris elsewhere calls the invisible text, that provides the *space* of breath. The fugitive time, the other time, breaks through the monuments of consolidation and, as Harris says, secrets a corridor into the future. The fugitivity also marks “the extreme originality” of the subjectivity of the West Indian.

The fugitivity and the originality form a certain constellation in Harris’s prose to offer an allegorical *and* ironic perspective to the phenomenality of dwelling. Thought in terms of the irony, the origin is frail, the origin is *traced* in the fugitive time. Let me follow this line of thought a little further. In the model of consolidation, time is robbed of its convoluted roots. But the time of dwelling is a convoluted time. The Lived time of dwelling is not only convoluted but also broken, fragmented. In the novel, *Jonestown*, if we may refer to Harris’s fiction, Francisco Bone, the character-writer of the novel, writes to W.H., the well-known editor of manuscripts by other “voyagers of the imagination,” about the time-consciousness of the South America: “The Maya were torn by the notion of eternity’s closure of time and another shape of time, blending pasts and futures to unlock closure or pact or plot.”¹⁹ Time, in this perception, is irreducibly blended across the ‘void’ of death. We read further:

¹⁹ Wilson Harris, *Jonestown* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 5.

There is no absolute beginning, for each 'beginning' comes after an unwritten past that awaits a new language. What lies behind us is linked incalculably to what lies ahead of us in that the future is a sliding scale backwards into the unfathomable past within the virgin womb of time.²⁰

This time-consciousness is however, for Bone, the survivor of the Jonestown 'tragedy,' the eminent act of survival. Dwelling, across the post-colonial divide, Harris seems to suggest, can only be conceived from the eminent perspective of survival. The time of survival-dwelling, for Harris, is no longer the time conceived as the inexorable continuum, but the fugitive time, the time uprooted, so to speak, from the continuum, the *other* time, which Bone describes as the Ghost-time: "I became an original apparition in my wanderings within over-arching Ghost in coming abreast of extremities of loss, in visualizing my own 'nothingness' as intangible 'somethingness.'" ²¹

Now, survival as the essential, yet enigmatic, core of the subjectivity of the West Indian offers a *new* conception of the subject. In "Tradition and The West Indian Novel," Harris reflects on the conception of subject with remarkable philosophical acuity and precision. The conception of the subject (the surviving subject) that emerges is irreducibly ironic. The irony stems from the distinction between the subject of consolidation (empirical subject) and the ironic conception of subject. The empirical subject relentlessly consolidates the tautology slave is a slave is a slave. The ironic conception, on the other hand, "breaks, as it were, the spell of the self-sufficient social animal; one breaks through, as it were, the one-sidedness of self-sufficient social character" (Tradition, 48). But when "one speaks of an inarticulate body of men, confined on some historical plane, as possessing the grassroots of Western individuality" one thinks of blended times that generate a new, even if ironic, conception of space; "one is [also] creatively rejecting, as if it were an illusion, every given, total and self-sufficient situation" (Tradition, 34). Here, Harris precisely thinks of the cross-cultural 'void' to articulate a conception of subject beyond the self-sufficient historical situation, a conception of subject otherwise than the self-sufficient identity. Importantly, the ironic conception leads Harris to reject the model of "sovereign individual as such" (Tradition, 34). "For in spite of his emancipation he consolidates every advance by conditioning himself to function solely within his contemporary situation more or less as the slave appears bound still upon his historical and archaic plane"

²⁰ Harris, *Jonestown*, 5.

²¹ Harris, *Jonestown*, 7.

(Tradition, 34). What results rather from the ironic conception is what we may call a conception of *finite* freedom, if we may borrow the concept from Heidegger and Levinas. Harris thus speaks of “dwelling within a capacity for liberation, a capacity for mental and unpredictable pain which the human person endured *then* or endures now *in* or *for* any time or place” (Tradition, 34). The freedom is finite in that it is through wound that the freedom can be truly intelligible. *Wound*, Harris would argue, is the *womb* of time, as though it is through wound that time times. In Harris’s writings, the subject, the subject of wound, appears as the fugitive subject, already dwelling *outside*, *maintaining* the relation of *outside* in the dwelling not in order then to appropriate the ‘outside’ within a synthetic totality but to maintain the very asymmetry, the non-contemporaneity, in the spacing of the dwelling. The fugitive subject, whose time is the other time, appears as the *host subject* of history, to which we will turn now.

Philosophy of History

In spite of the important historical works, there does not yet exist, Harris opines, a philosophy of history original to the West Indies and to the Third World, which would also be capable of universal application. The historical convention, which includes not only the colonial historiography but also a certain progressive history writing, consolidates the documentary *stasis* of imperialism and fatally ignores the native consciousness. Harris begins his canonical essay, ‘History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas,’ by commenting critically on the historiographic dispute between J.A. Froude and J.J. Thomas. In *Froudacity: West Indian Fables by James Anthony Froude* (1889), J.J. Thomas scathingly criticized Froude’s defense of slave property and colonial system of government as it was established in the West Indies in the later 18th and the 19th Century. In *Froudacity*, Thomas not only indicted slavery but also argued for the self-rule by the natives. Against Froude’s accidental view of history Thomas proposed a controlling law of history. It is not my intent here to offer a detailed overview of the dispute. Suffice it here to mention briefly Harris’s critical account of the dispute, which would provide the background against which to see Harris’s own philosophy of history. Harris describes Froude’s view of history as “ornamental stasis” (SEWH, 153). Here is Harris’s remark on Froude’s defense of property (slave property): “This ornamental stasis... depicts rather ironically but accurately “Froude’s relationship to property as something so sovereign, so accidental, so fortuitous, it serves

to eclipse all sensibility. Such an eclipse of sensibility may well be an omen of an age in which, not long before, the person had been property (slave property). And this area of eclipse of sensibility held Froude unwittingly, I would imagine, in its toils – in its historical prison” (SEWH, 153). Did Thomas’s criticism of Froude in terms of the deterministic law of history, as opposed to Froude’s accidental view of history, achieve a real breakthrough in historical imagination? Harris’s answer is negative. It is Harris’s critical point that if the emphasis, in Froude, on the dicey, accidental character on nature and society makes his defense of property, which includes human beings as property, so sovereign, accidental, so fortuitous that it eclipses all sensibilities, and holds Froude in the historical prison, then Thomas’s defense of the controlling law of history, in his rebuttal of Froude, nonetheless consolidates “a fortuitous destiny or ornament of history” (SEWH, 154). “Froude and Thomas, in this respect, were children of the nineteenth century and neither possessed the genius to penetrate intuitively or otherwise the ironic trap of the ornament, of the prison, of the wasteland” (SEWH, 155). Even though Thomas criticizes slavery with great passion he clearly fails “to deepen the ornament of his age in such a way that unpredictable intuitive resources would affect the *prison* of the object and therefore the *person* of the object” (SEWH, 155). For all his indictments of the injustice of slavery, Thomas, according to Harris, could not offer “a figurative meaning beyond the condition he deplored” (SEWH, 156). Harris’s critical remarks on this historiographic dispute have far reaching consequences. Not only the imperial historical convention but also the progressive, anti-imperial, histories may reinforce the historical stasis. They share the same “statistical frame,” or, an economic deterministic political frame. The deterministic frame, Harris argues, is “a related aspect of a civilization which saw men as bundles of labouring, fighting time, time-fodder to fertilise the fields of industry or to fence the high seas” (SEWH, 180). The frame is material / ideological and belongs, structurally, that is, to the economic. Harris would further insist that the dubious notion of historical progress (through stages of ‘evolution’) is the one offshoot of the statistical frame that reduces the native to the status of a victim without the inner time.

Now, the native consciousness (and its essential invisible text) is discontinuous with the frame of consolidation. The discontinuity breaches the frame or the story-line of consolidation. The time of fulfillment offers a *new*, in that sense, *synthetic*, rather than tautological, *presentation* of time(s). The time of fulfillment is, strictly speaking, a *constellation* of time(s). What Harris calls “lived drama” is the ironic expression of the constellation.

There is a cleavage between the historical convention and the arts of the imagination. What marks the difference is the decisive category of time. The transfiguration, which is the essential characteristics of the arts of imagination, belongs to the "inner time" of the native. The concept of transfiguration characteristic of the inner time leads Harris to articulate a concept of *passage* that essentially distinguishes the arts of imagination from the historical convention. The concept of passage is paradigmatic for the native dweller because "the truth of community which he pursues is not a self-evident fact: it is neither purely circumscribed nor purely produced by economic circumstances" (Tradition, 60). Hence, the importance of passage "across a certain territory of primordial but broken recollection in search of a community whose existence he begins to discern within capacities of unique fiction" (Tradition, 54).

The passage opens up a vertiginous 'void' in areas of "inner pragmatic security" (Tradition, 60). Harris thus speaks, in a Dantesque manner, of the importance of descending into the 'void' (Tradition, 60). The crumbling of inner security no doubt offers a dimension of tragic extremity to the dwelling and its inner time. In *Jonestown*, if we may recall, Francisco Bone writes of becoming an "original apparition in my wanderings within over-arching Ghost." Thought in terms of the tragic extremity, the time of the philosophy of history original to the Caribbean and the South America is the over-arching Ghost-time. The concept of the Ghost-time has far reaching consequences for the philosophy of history. For one thing, it is important, I think, to distinguish Harris's Ghost-time from the pantragedism of, say, the Hegelian conception of History as Spirit. Harris would certainly call Hegel's pantragedism an absolute model of fiction.²² Now, if the word Ghost designates an existence ("somethingness") without a proper, tangible living presence (body), then Ghost-time, being unassemblable in any determinate body of the present, remains, as it has always already been, disjointed and even anachronic. Further, Harris's insistence on the necessity, for the host subject, of descending into the 'void' is more akin to exteriorization of consciousness, in the sense of a positive relation with exteriority and otherness, than to the strategies of interiorization *qua consciousness*. Let me pursue further the concept of passage in Harris's reflections on the cross-cultural myths in the Caribbean.

As we have noted, Harris's conception of history is rooted in the arts of imagination and memory. Harris draws the poetics of history from the obscure (obscured by Enlightenment, as it were) folk imagination of

²² For an account of Hegel's conception of history as pantragedism, see chapter 2 of Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*.

the people. For the inner time of the native is exteriorized in the fables and myths of generations. From the perspective of conventional history, myth disavows time and death. It gives an eternal image of time past. Harris, so to speak, reverses the idea. The fables and myths have the function of repetition. In its repetition myth produces *new* time, a new architecture of space. Passage is the temporal space of repetition.

Harris especially describes two original myths that have undergone a "sea change," a metamorphosis in their passage from Africa to the new world. Indeed, as we will see, the idea of metamorphosis is crucial to the myths themselves. Two myths Harris looks at are Caribbean limbo and Haitian vodun. In both the dance forms is "re-played" the original experience of difference, dismemberment and trauma that is associated with the Middle Passage. The concept of passage is crucial in Harris's account of the dance forms in that limbo, as Harris reminds us, is not the total recall of the African past since that past is traumatically eclipsed with the Middle Passage. Both the Guyanese/Brazilian limbo and Haitian vodun have their ancestry in Africa. But the re-visionary, imaginative aspects of the dance forms were absent in the old "Tribal World" of Africa. As Harris notes, African vodun was very conservative in its practices. "With African vodun... the integrity of the tribal person was one with the system which was conservative and traditional. There was no breath of subversion – no cleavage in the collective. History and art were one medium. With Guyanese/West Indian limbo that cleavage is a fact and the rise of the imaginative arts has occurred in the face of long-held intellectual and legal suspicion" (SEWH, 166). The distinctiveness of Caribbean limbo lies in the fact that it was "rather the renaissance of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures" (SEWH, 158). A new architecture is another name for the passage of space, which proves to be indispensable for "a gateway society" which is involved in an original re-vision and compensatory re-creation of the past (SEWH, 159).

Harris calls the myth of limbo a "limbo perspective" (SEWH, 157). As a perspective, limbo establishes a re-*vision* of the past. Harris also calls it a spider perspective. In the limbo dance "[t]he dancer moves under a bar which is gradually lowered until a mere a slit of space, it seems, remains through which with spreadeagled limbs he passes like a spider" (SEWH, 157). "Some of the performers danced on high stilts like elongated limbs while others performed spreadeagled on the ground. In this way limbo spider and stilted pole of the gods were related to the drums like grassroots and branches of lightning to the sound of thunder"

(SEWH, 157). In limbo, the dancer becomes the 'space,' embodies, as it were, the "slit of space." The dancer metamorphoses himself, if we may extend a metaphor Harris often uses, into "a human gateway," into a threshold and a passage between the 'space' and 'the dwelling.' In other words, in limbo, as in vodun, the dancer dwells on the vanishing threshold between the object (the space) and the subject (the dancer himself).

Limbo, Harris asserts, has profound, even if ironic, significance for "the inner universality of Caribbean man" for, as Harris reminds us, those waves of migrations which have hit the shores of America always "possessed the stamp of the spider metamorphosis" (SEWH, 157). In which way, then, does the limbo myth repeat the originary difference, and, in repeating, transfigure the difference into a mode of dwelling? Quoting the poetic authority of folk knowledge – "it is said," Harris remarks, – Harris asserts that limbo was born on the slave ships of the Middle Passage. Limbo was born in the Night of the Middle Passage. "There was so little space that the slaves contorted themselves into human spiders" (SEWH, 157). If we may put it in a certain dialectical language, on the verge of being reduced to object (space) the slaves transformed that being into a mode of dwelling. In conventional imagination, between Africa and the Americas lies the empty chain of miles, a wasteland, so to speak. In contrast, in the conception of *passage* there is "the curious dislocation of a chain of miles reflected in the dance so that a *re-trace* of the Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas and the West Indies is not to be equated with a uniform sum" (SEWH, 157 emphasis mine). Limbo then is to be thought as the original arts of imaginative dwelling on the Middle Passage, which dislocates "the uniform chain of miles" (SEWH, 157). Now, in the limbo performance, the dancer *repeats* and imaginatively reactivates the *passage of space*, as it were, for the first time. "The limbo dance therefore implies, I believe, a profound art of compensation which seeks to re-play a dismemberment of tribes ... and to invoke at the same time a curious psychic re-assembly of the parts of the dead god or gods. And that re-assembly which issued from a state of cramp to articulate a new growth – and to point to the necessity for a new kind of drama, novel and poem – is a creative phenomenon of the first importance in the imagination of a people violated by economic fates" (SEWH, 159).

The limbo repetition thus provides an answer to the quest how to re-think a dwelling and an "evolution" in a passage that is not a transition, nor a growth, nor an evolution. The limbo myth re-enacts what Harris calls the cross-cultural gateway complex. A gateway is neither inside nor outside. A gateway opens space. The limbo dancer, by becoming a human

gateway, opens space. But, this is a spectral space, a spectral return of the space-time of the dismembered slaves. If we may read Harris's account closely, the *time* of limbo is thus the fugitive time, the *surplus time*, so to speak, over the time of consolidation. The dancer, in Harris's account, is the fugitive subject who hosts the fugitive time. The fugitive time of limbo myth offers *time* for a genuine, re-visionary, conception of tradition and evolution, which should be then conceived against the grain of convention. It is in this light that we should read Harris's comment, in "The Continuity and Discontinuity," "When I emphasise 'evolution' I am concerned with the gateway-complex between cultures. Such a gateway-complex means, in fact, that one stresses a discontinuous line – the missing link, as it were, between cultures rather than a hard continuous diving wall" (SEWH, 177). In our reading, the time of limbo is the *other* time, the time *of* the other, and the dancer is the host subject *for* the other. "It is legitimate, I feel," writes Harris, "to pun on limbo as a kind of shared phantom limb which has become the subconscious variable in West Indian theatre" (SEWH, 157). The recurrent motif of the phantom limb, which the dancer embodies, refers us to a non-contemporaneity, to an irreducible exteriority, in the *body* of the present. Harris seems to suggest that it is the task of the philosopher of history to draw its poetics from the subconscious and respond to its anachronic time.

It is Harris's point, let us repeat, that the limbo dance is the human gateway that dislocates the uniform chain of miles. As a gateway, limbo offers the passage to the other time. Or, to put it otherwise, it is the *return* of the other time that *gives* time, as it were, for the first time, and in which space becomes intelligible. Limbo shares the phantom limb with Haitian vodun "across an English/French divide of Caribbean cultures" (SEWH, 162). If limbo is a legitimate pun on limb, then the Haitian vodun is a pun on void. In an inimitably powerful passage which originally appears in *Tradition the Writer and Society*, and which Harris himself quotes in "History, Fable and Myth," Harris describes vodun as the spacing of the originary 'void.' "Haitian *vodun* or voodoo is a highly condensed feature of inspiration and hallucination within which 'space' itself becomes the sole expression and recollection of the dance – as if 'space' is the character of the dance ... the very void of sensation in which the dancer begins to move, like an authentic spectre ... makes him or her ... a dramatic agent of subconscious. The life from within and the life from without now truly overlap" (Tradition, 50–51). The overlap of the life from within and the life from without constitutes the ironic character of *spacing* in the dance. For in this overlap space becomes temporalised. It is a space *inclined in time* across the 'void.'

Like the Caribbean limbo, the Haitian vodun is also a reassembly of dismembered god or gods and thus a “creative fulfilment” of a “matrix of association which had not fulfilled itself in the Old world of Africa” (SEWH, 162). That fulfillment, however, is not an imitation of the past “but a new and daring creative conception in itself” (SEWH, 162). Thus, Harris suggests that “[t]he community the writer shares with the primordial dancer is, as it were, the complementary halves of a broken stage” (Tradition, 52). It is not only the African Past but also the European past that is *re*-visioned in the transfigured community. In “The Unfinished Genesis of The Imagination,” Harris refers to the Dantesque plot of the novel, *Carnival* and formulates the temporal structure of the transfiguration in a fascinating way: “There are stars in Dante’s thirteenth-century cosmos he would never have perceived as we perceive them. They were fixed. Whereas for us the light that comes across space from a star is but the shadow of an object that may have vanished. News of its disappearance has not yet been transmitted to us. To put it differently. Within the abyss of tradition – within the spatiality, the spectrality of tradition – the original nucleus that motivates us is so peculiar, so unidentifiable, that singularity needs plurality” (SEWH, 251).

At this point, let me refer briefly to an influential historiographic reflection in the recent postcolonial studies. The text under consideration is Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty’s remarkable essay “Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts.” For in this text Chakrabarty not only comes close to Harris’s critique of the model of consolidation but attempts to articulate a heterotemporal structure, the “time-knots,” of history peculiar to the postcolonial societies. It is not my intent here to comment on the overall project of *Provincializing Europe*. I shall focus on the chapter ‘Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts’ in order to critically reflect on the themes related to our discussion. Minority histories, for Chakrabarty, “describes relationships to the pasts that the “rationality” of the historian’s methods necessarily makes “minor” or “inferior,” as something “nonrational” in the course of, and as a result of, its own operation.”²³ Chakrabarty calls the subordinated relations to the past “subaltern” pasts. The relations are called “subaltern” because “they represent moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional history.”²⁴ According to

²³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 101.

²⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 101.

Chakrabarty's argument, a certain assumption of teleological hierarchy between the subaltern pasts and the "modern" historiographic operation is retained even in a radical history that otherwise seeks to rescue the singularity of that past. Thus, in a spirit of internal critique, Chakrabarty reads Ranajit Guha's celebrated essay, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," a key text of Subaltern Studies. "A principal aim of Guha's essay was to use the 1855 rebellion of the Santals to demonstrate a cardinal principle of subaltern history: making the insurgent's consciousness the mainstay of a narrative about rebellion."²⁵ Chakrabarty's main point of critique, to put it rather succinctly, is that in spite of Guha's desire to listen to the Santal rebel voice seriously his (Guha's) modern, secular, "narrative strategy" does not give the supernatural the same "agency" that the Santal rebels themselves gave him. There is a hiatus, so to speak, between the "modern" historiographic operation and the Santal's own "voice." How does Chakrabarty himself address the relation to the singularity of the "subaltern" pasts without anthropologizing and/or historicizing it? Chakrabarty's historiographic alternative is to offer what he calls a conception of heterogeneity of the present. For Chakrabarty, the heterogeneity amounts to the irreducible plurality of two gestures: one is that of historicizing the Santal in the interest of "modern" history; and the other, that of seeing the Santal as a figure illuminating a life possibility for the present.²⁶ In the second gesture, "the Santal stands as our contemporary."²⁷ "Thus the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself."²⁸ This is where Chakrabarty apparently comes close to Harris's conception of heterotemporal constellation. But, we want to insist, only apparently. A close reading of Chakrabarty's argument for the plurality of times may make evident the crucial difference between them. Chakrabarty's discursive conclusion remains positivist, and somewhat fails to offer, phenomenologically, that is, an articulation of the postcolonial, "modern," divide and the alterity that belongs to it.

The major drawback from which Chakrabarty's argument suffers is the absence of any relation of alterity and otherness in regard to what he calls the subaltern pasts. Chakrabarty, in fact, refuses the temporal otherness of the subaltern pasts and thus disavows the *claim* of the otherness on the

²⁵ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 102.

²⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 108.

²⁷ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 108.

²⁸ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*, 109.

historiographic operation. Without the conception of the otherness of the pasts the plurality of times would simply amount to spatialization of 'times' co-existing together, which can then be amenable to totalization. The empirical plurality of times is, in Chakrabarty's argument, represented in the utilitarian rubric of what he, following Heidegger, calls being-in-the-world. Chakrabarty's own argument thus disavows the very heterotemporality that he himself attempts to theorize.

What distinguishes Harris's philosophy of history is the *re*-configuration of the past in the architecture of the present across the postcolonial divide. In Harris, the postcolonial divide is phenomenologically articulated. The ironic phenomenology remains a phenomenology of enigma, if we may use the word in Levinas's sense, as the divide, instead of being consolidated, is transfigured into the temporal passage and as this phenomenology articulates a conception of the subject *for* the Other. It is Harris's insight that without the conception of the host subject, whose time is essentially anachronic, postcolonial history would only consolidate the *postcolonial* divide and remain, in its method, positivist. Harris's phenomenological history, original in regard to the postcolonial societies and yet capable of universal application, has thus, in its essential core, a drama in which the divide is transfigured into a passage. In the drama of consciousness, which is essentially ironic, the passage of space is reactivated, granted, as it were, by the Other whose trace body the host subject of history embodies.

CHAPTER FIVE

FECUNDITY OF THE ETHICAL: DECONSTRUCTION, HISTORY, AND THE SUBALTERN IN GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critical thought responds to the ethical imperative that the postcolonial critic must follow the singular itinerary of the subaltern subject. In this chapter, I shall attempt to follow Spivak's tracing of the singularity of the subaltern subject through the force field of historical representation. It is Spivak's contention that the notion of the undivided, sovereign subject, even when radical in its intention, only consolidates the discursive model of the dominant epistemology, which it is the task of the postcolonial critic to undermine. In this, Spivak is in the company of writers such as Homi Bhabha and Wilson Harris. The postcolonial subject, according to Spivak, is essentially catachrestic *and* non-self-identical. Following a certain Derrida, Spivak would further argue that there is discontinuity in the relation of the subject of epistemology and the subject of ethico-politics. Maintaining the critical focus on the *aporia* between the epistemological and the ethical, rather than the linearity and the identity of the relation, stems from the ethical imperative that it is the singularity of the Other that must be preserved in the critical work. Although Spivak interprets deconstruction as critique, I want to nonetheless argue that there is, in Spivak's setting to work of deconstruction, a certain ethos of responsibility that we may, following Derrida, call post-critical.

In his "foreword" to Spivak's *In Other Worlds*, Colin MacCabe has described Spivak as "a Feminist Marxist deconstructivist," meaning by that description not an identity, "but a network of multiple contradictions, traces, inscriptions."¹ Rather than reconciling them in a system, Spivak's work preserves their heterogeneity and discontinuities. Indeed, the heterogeneity belongs to the very logic of what Spivak calls *setting to work of deconstruction* (Derrida, Marx, and Freud), which Spivak elsewhere calls the work of supplementation. The subaltern, which, for Spivak,

¹ Colin MacCabe, foreword to *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Routledge, 1988), ix. All further references to this volume will be referred parenthetically in the text as IOW, followed by the page number.

is the entry point to the force field of postcolonial representation, is the name “for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space.”² Thus, it is not only her theoretical method but also the content of her analysis that account for the anti-systemic character of Spivak’s critical thinking.

I shall approach Spivak’s critical thinking through her interpretive reading and use (setting to work) of Derrida’s deconstruction. In the first section of the chapter, I shall attempt to offer an interpretive overview of Spivak’s engagement with Derrida. In that context, I shall focus on the deconstructive predicament of the subject. A brief reflection on what I would like to call the fecundity of ethical performance (at the limit of epistemo-ontology) will provide the transition to the second section of the chapter. The second section will be devoted to Spivak’s setting to work of deconstruction. My main contention will be that Spivak’s reflection on historiography, which will occupy the main portion of the second section, is, in its core, ethical rather than essential. I refer to the distinction between the ethical and the essential throughout this chapter in the sense Levinas uses the distinction in *Otherwise Than Being*.

Deconstructive Nominalism and the Subject

The distinctiveness of Spivak’s reading of Derrida is to interpret deconstruction as a nominalist enterprise. According to Spivak, Derrida’s project, right from the start, has been paleonymic, that is, rereading of old words such as “writing.”³ Importantly, for Spivak, such nominalism would be catachrestic and strategic. The rhetorical term catachresis means a use of a word or a concept without an adequate literal referent, a term wrenched from the supposedly proper context. Nominalism, “an obsession with names that are necessarily misnames,”⁴ that characterizes deconstruction is essentially impure and, if we may use the word, fragile. Deconstruction is necessarily strategic in that deconstruction is a

² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 310. All further reference to the text will be parenthetically cited in the text as CPR, followed by the page number.

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Revolutions that as yet have no model: Derrida’s ‘Limited Inc.,’” in *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996), 79. All further references to the text will be parenthetically cited as SR, followed by the page number.

⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 133.

critical work without a transcendent truth that “can govern theologically the totality of the field.”⁵ Spivak would argue that, in the practice of deconstructive nominalism, catachresis and strategy imply each other and are, in a certain sense, inseparable. By the same token, it must be asserted that what gives nominalism the deconstructive turn, both in Derrida and in Spivak, is that deconstruction employs the old names and signs only in order to reveal the “unnameable” and the “*unheard of thoughts*” beyond the metaphysical closure and beyond the logic of palaeonymy.

According to Spivak, Derrida’s terms like writing, trace, iterability etc. are palaeonymic in that these terms contain a certain unity, or, more correctly, asymmetric unity, of their general and narrow (empirical) senses. As Spivak writes in her essay “More on Power/Knowledge,” “The relationship between the general and narrow senses spans the active articulation of deconstruction in a considerable variety of ways. As I and many others have noted, writing, trace, difference, woman, origin, parergon, gift – and now, in Derrida’s latest phase – such more resonant words as justice, democracy, friendship are cracked and barred in their operation by this two-sense divide ... the relationship between the two senses is never clear-cut. One bleeds into the other at all times.”⁶ Asymmetric relationship of the general and narrow senses accounts for the “necessary lack of fit between discourse and example, the necessary crisis between theory and practice, that marks deconstruction.”⁷ Spivak would further argue that the necessary “crisis” that the deconstructive terms themselves contain keeps open, in Spivak’s Kantian vocabulary, the required separation between critical and dogmatic. “By ‘critical’ I mean a philosophy that is aware of the limits of knowing. By ‘dogmatic’ I mean a philosophy that advances coherent general principles without sufficient interest in empirical details.”⁸

There is an affirmative critical ethos, a critical intimacy, in the hermeneutic practice of deconstruction. “Affirmative deconstruction says ‘yes’ to a text twice, sees complicity when it could rather easily be oppositional.”⁹ Deconstruction is not simply an exposure of error, as the critique in deconstruction, Spivak suggests, is the critique of things that are extremely useful, things without which we cannot live on.¹⁰ The critical intimacy of deconstruction with the object of deconstruction follows from

⁵ Derrida, *Margins*, 7.

⁶ Spivak, *Outside*, 28.

⁷ Spivak, *Outside*, 28.

⁸ Spivak, *Outside*, 25.

⁹ Spivak, *Outside*, 129.

¹⁰ Spivak, *Outside*, 4.

deconstruction's own strategy of hermeneutic negotiation. The following, much cited, passage in *Of Grammatology* succinctly refers to the hermeneutic strategy:

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally ... the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.¹¹

However, as Spivak suggests, the hermeneutic, double, gesture does not permit us to see deconstruction as a kind of narrative of self-defeat. The hermeneutic that Derrida adheres to is akin to the hermeneutic circle Heidegger refers to in *Being and Time*, the circle into which one must come the right way. Deconstruction, in Derrida's context, does not consist in passing from one concept to another. Nor is it a simple reversal of the opposition. Deconstruction practices an overturning *and* a general displacement of a conceptual order and nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated. This overturning and displacement provide deconstruction the means with which to *intervene* in the field of opposition that it deconstructs.¹² It is this hermeneutic aspect of deconstruction that leads Spivak to call, in an obituary article on Derrida, Deconstruction "an activist approach to concepts," by which Spivak means attention to detail that no concept that needs to be practiced can ignore. "Derrida submitted intellectual labour to the test of manual labour, scientific labour, women's work. It is because of this, I believe, that Jürgen Habermas has written that 'Derrida's deconstruction is essentially a praxis.' Habermas understands that Derrida's attention to detail does not mean giving up. It means persistence, repetition, circling back, for the job is never quite done."¹³

Let me return to Spivak's theme of the catachrestic unity of the general and the narrow senses of Derrida's terms and the critical implications Spivak draws from such asymmetric unity. In her 1980 essay "Revolutions that as yet have no model: Derrida's 'Limited Inc.,'" Spivak brings the focus

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 24.

¹² Derrida, *Margins*, 329.

¹³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Remembering Derrida," *Radical Philosophy* 129, January-February 2005, 16.

on Derrida's terms like writing and iterability. Writing in Derrida, Spivak reminds us, designates "*both* the trace structure in general *and* empirical forms of writing in the narrow sense, even as it annuls that very opposition" (SR 83). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida's deconstructive task is not simply to reverse the traditional hierarchy of speech and writing in order to make writing innocent.¹⁴ If writing is the *name* of the absence of signatory and of the referent,¹⁵ Derrida's phenomenological task is to reveal the *horizon* within which such absence is possible. That horizon is revealed, paradoxically, as the originary differentiality, alterity and trace, which the concept of general writing, or arche-writing designate. Spivak calls this horizontal structure mark-ability or graphematicity (SR 79). "It is by means of that mark-ability that *something* – never tangibly self-identical – is carried over in acts of speech and writing" (SR 79). As Spivak argues, Derrida's method shares "the structure of irreducible self-alterity carried by the backward and forward and many-planed tracing of intentions in writing. In other words, it seeks to be graphematic rather than logocentric. Hence its name is graphic rather than logic" (SR 98). Now, the concept of *graphie* [unit of a possible graphic system] *already* implies, Derrida writes, the "framework of the *instituted trace*, as the possibility common to all systems of significations."¹⁶ The common conception of writing is only a metaphor of the graphematicity of arche-writing. The latter cannot be thought within the symmetric opposition of speech and writing. Rather, as graphematic synthesis, writing, in Derrida's horizontal sense, accounts for the possibility of the opposition in the first place.

Now, and this should be crucial in any understanding of Derrida and also Spivak, the arche-writing, as trace, is what is also short-of the transcendental synthesis,¹⁷ in that the concept of arche-writing implies the necessary and originary contamination and corruption of the transcendental and all idealities by its opposites, and refers, in the context of the opposition of speech and writing, to the originary usurpation, parasitism, repetition. Writing is thus a quasi-transcendental term, a catachrestic name of the graphematicity. Graphematicity, for Spivak, indicates the (pre) originary appropriation, or better, the ungraspable ground of appropriation.

Phenomenological and transcendental conception of horizon is at the same time construed and crossed out through the concept of trace.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 37.

¹⁵ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 41.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 46.

¹⁷ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 61.

If I may refer to Rodolphe Gasche's canonical reading of Derrida, the concept of the trace, or what Derrida calls the *arche-trace*, is quasi-transcendental, as it contains the logic of catachresis. Derrida, it would not be wrong to say, thinks trace in place of the transcendental horizon. Trace is the name for the necessary possibility of inscription in general and refers to the structure of alterity and the relation of otherness that is required by the constitution of identity.¹⁸ The concept of the trace, in Derrida, is catachrestic in that it functions, paradoxically, as the 'transcendental' structure of an irreducible otherness and nonpresence, which by its very operation makes any transcendental and phenomenological synthesis finally impossible. The trace is the condition of ideality, in so far as the ideality must be infinitely repeatable in order to be. The possibility of repetition, as the basis of identification, is trace. As a catachrestic concept, the trace refers to a constitutive nonpresence, a non-primordially.¹⁹ Thus, in 'Revolutions,' Spivak notes that while repetition functions as the basis of identification, every repetition is an alteration, which "would put into question both a transcendental idealism that claims that the idea is infinitely repeatable as the same and a speech act theory that bases its conclusions on intentions and contexts that can be defined and transferred within firm outlines" (SR 86). Iterability is the name of the double gesture. "Thus iterability – like the trace structure – is the *positive* condition of possibility of identification, the very thing whose absolute rigor it renders impossible" (SR 87).

The logic of the catachresis of trace is evident in Derrida's remark that the unmotivatedness of the trace requires a synthesis in which the completely other is *announced as such*. But when the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself.²⁰ This notion of the trace, as necessarily self-dissimulated, leads Spivak to conclude that "even the decision that makes the trace of the other in the origin intelligible as writing in the general sense ... cannot be *finally* endorsed."²¹ As Spivak argues, as in the case of writing, conceived in the restricted sense, we are not necessarily certain of the identity of the originator, so in the case of the graphematic structure "we cannot endorse the 'fact' that it is an absent presence of which the trace-structure at the origin is the mark. ... This

¹⁸ Rodolphe Gasche, *The Tain of The Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), chapter 9.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 6–7.

²⁰ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 47.

²¹ Spivak, *Outside*, 31.

unendurable naming of the discovery of the repetition at the origin as 'graphematic,' by way of 'writing' as a catachresis, is the double bind that founds all deconstruction."²²

The double bind informs Derrida's and Spivak's approach to the conception of the subject. The graphematicity or the trace structure of writing cannot be thought under the category of the subject, that is, substantiality of self-presence, or identity of the selfsame. It is Derrida's point, if we may put it briefly, that if writing refers, originally, to *spacing* ("notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space"), which is always the unperceived, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious, then spacing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject.²³ But, by the same token, Derrida argues that "[a]s the subject's relationship with its own death, this becoming is the constitution of subjectivity."²⁴ The subjectivity is itself catachrestic in its 'constitution.'

In "Revolutions," Spivak maintains that deconstruction of classical concepts of intentionality, as self-presence and self-possession, does not mean that intentionality is effaced or denied. While the trace-structure of writing, or graphematicity mark the limit that no concept of intention can cross, "it is these very limits, demarcating intention, that produced it, and allow it function as such" (SR 81). Spivak names the limit "unconscious" and distinguishes it from a potential reserve of consciousness. Unconscious is the name for radical alterity. Spivak writes:

In order to work with such a graphematic intentionality, one needs a name for something that is at every moment divisively other yet indispensable to the production of the same, an "it" that resolutely leaves its track at every intended origin or goal. This "it" is not a transcendental unity, because with every heterogeneous move of receiver, sender, and the world of meanings, it changes its shape and fills the (no)place that marks a contingent limit. (SR 83)

In Spivak, as in Derrida, the subject inhabits the catachrestic space, as it is constituted by its relation with its own death, by its relation with the entirely other. However, deconstruction, Spivak reminds us, is *not* a narrative of the decentred subject. Rather, Spivak's *critical* suggestion is that the subject is always centred, and deconstruction persistently points out that "this centring is an effect-structure with indeterminable boundaries

²² Spivak, *Outside*, 131.

²³ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 69.

²⁴ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 69.

that can only be deciphered as determining.”²⁵ In her essay, “Feminism and Deconstruction,” Spivak critically engages with Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche in *Spurs*, where “woman” emerges as a name that is the non-truth of “truth.” The following text summarizes her own critical gesture that persistently focuses on the *mis*-naming of the subject (woman): “The claim to deconstructive feminism (and deconstructive antisexism – the political claim of deconstructive feminists) cannot be sustained in the name of “woman” within the Derridean problematic. Like class consciousness, which justifies its own production so that historical class-formation can be undone, “woman” as the name of writing must be erased in so far it is a necessarily historical catachresis.”²⁶

Now, it is my point that although Spivak’s critical thinking stays at the *limit* of epistemo-ontology, like Derrida, “tends to the ontic,” and resists the theoretical gesture that wants to show linearity and continuity between the subject of epistemology and the subject of ethico-politics, for Spivak, the necessary catachresis (and the double bind) is also a fecund space where ethics are *performed*. Let me cite an insightful passage from “More on Power/Knowledge,” where Spivak thinks Derrida’s nominalism by way of the Heideggerian thought of ontico-ontological difference:

For both Foucault and Derrida, in different ways, the ontico-ontological difference is a thinking through of the uses and limits of a critical philosophy. Their catachrestic nominalism may be trying to touch the ontic with the thought that there is a subindividual (or random, for Derrida) space even under, or below, or before... (the grasp begins to falter here, but how can philosophers who will not admit that actual ethical practice is affected, indeed constituted by this, understand why it is worth trying?) ‘preontological Being as [Dasein’s] ontically constitutive state... [where] Dasein *tacitly* understands and interprets something like Being”²⁷

Spivak points at, in the Heideggerian terms, the preoriginary (precontinuous, in Spivak’s language) *and* non-contemporaneous co-belonging of being and non-being. What Spivak terms “subindividual,” random, space is the graphematic *force* or the trace, which, according to Spivak, marks the limit of epistemo ontology and is also the condition *within* which “ethics are *performed*, by subjects constituted in different ways.”²⁸ The “unmotivated” trace or the graphematic force is, in the strict sense, the limit *and* the (un)condition of the finite “subject” of ethico-politics, which, Spivak

²⁵ Spivak, *Outside*, 132.

²⁶ Spivak, *Outside*, 137.

²⁷ Spivak, *Outside*, 30.

²⁸ Spivak, *Outside*, 30.

argues, should be conceived as non-self-identity. Spivak, in the above passage, then thinks of the ethical call to/of the entirely other through the breach that ontico-ontological difference designates. As we have seen in our reading of *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to this co-belonging of being and non-being on several levels. In Being-toward-death, there is coincidence (without conjunction) of Dasein's ownmost and othermost. In the call, or more properly, in the listening to the call, Dasein inhabits the originary, differential, line of Dasein and the other. Likewise, the catachrestic subject inhabits the differential line, which is the condition of possibility of ethical performance.

I would like to close this section with a brief reflection on what I should like to call the *fecundity* of ethical performance of the finite subject. As I have mentioned, in Spivak, the ethical performance is enacted at the *limit* of epistemo-ontology. The fecundity of ethical performance, however, requires all the resources of subjectivity. Spivak offers such a conception of ethical performance in a fecund articulation of mother tongue. Here is the important passage from "More on Power/Knowledge":

A mother tongue is a language with a history – in that sense it is "instituted" – before our birth and after our death, where patterns that can be filled with anyone's "motivation" have laid themselves down. In this sense it is "unmotivated" but not capricious." We learn it in a natural way and fill it once and for all with our "intentions" and thus make it "our own" for the span of our life and then leave it, without intent – as unmotivated and uncaptious as we found it (without intent) when it founds us – for its other users.²⁹

A mother tongue has thus the structure of the trace. As the unmotivated institution, mother tongue is 'where' intentionality is constituted in my original vulnerability and passivity towards the other. Mother tongue is the fecund space of subject's responsibility, which, Spivak would suggest, is "lived" in the corporeal obligation to the other. In this sense of corporeality, mother tongue is "natural." In this connection, I should also like to use the term fecund in Levinas's sense. "The relation with such a future, irreducible to the power over possibles, we shall call fecundity" (TI 267). As a relation of unmotivated trace, fecundity of mother tongue denotes my future, but is not a future of the same. It articulates the time of the entirely other. The responsibility implied by the conception of mother tongue requires all the resources of subjectivity. But, the "subjectivity" that Spivak points at in the above passage is the non-self-identity and

²⁹ Spivak, *Outside*, 27.

comes very close to what Levinas would call *creaturality*. Interestingly, Levinas refers to the *creaturely* subject in his comment on Derrida's deconstruction of autarchic and sovereign subject. "It will be less readily recognized – Derrida would probably refuse to do so – that this critique of being in its eternal presence of ideality allows us, for the first time in the history of the West, to conceive of the *being of the creature* without resorting to the ontic narrative of a divine operation – without treating the "being" ["*etre*"] of the creature as *a* being [*un etant*] from the outset..."³⁰

As we shall soon see, Spivak famously characterizes her critical work as strategic. Spivak's conception of strategy should be understood with the deconstructive reversal of its meaning. Strategy, in contrast to its common sense understanding, here means displacement of the dominant meaning of a 'text' and opening it to the entirely other. I wish to reaffirm the point before moving to the next section. I would like to suggest, in advance, that what ultimately guides Spivak's critical strategies is what Derrida calls a post-critical sense of responsibility to the entirely other.

History, Representation, and the Subaltern

Representation

One of the fundamental tasks of postcolonial theory, especially after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, has been to problematize the consolidation of "modern" Europe as sovereign subject, indeed sovereign and Subject. It is not only that the figure of the colonized has been constructed as the self-consolidating other, but Europe, as Spivak comments, "had consolidated itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as 'Others', even as it constituted them, for purposes of administration and the expansion of markets, into programmed near-images of that very sovereign self" (CPR 199). The consolidation of the economy of the self and the other in the colonial discourse always requires a temporal schema, which is provided by historicism. Said draws attention to the function of historicism in the consolidation of colonialism:

So far as Orientalism in particular and European knowledge of other societies in general have been concerned, historicism meant that one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or was observed from the vantage point of Europe, or the West... What has never taken place is an

³⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, "Jacques Derrida: Wholly Otherwise," in *Proper Names*, trans. M.B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 60.

epistemological critique at the most fundamental level of the connection between the development of a historicism which has expanded and developed enough to include antithetical attitudes such as ideologies of imperialism and critiques of imperialism on the one hand, and on the other, the actual practice of imperialism by which the accumulation of territories and population, the control of economies, and the incorporation and homogenization of histories are maintained.³¹

Said's own critique of the discourse of Orientalism is one such "epistemological critique" of the temporal schema of colonial discourse. Spivak carries forward the epistemological critique that is inaugurated by Said. The colonial discourse, according to both Said and Spivak, is an intricate system of (historicist) representation that constructs 'historical' object through a process that is similar to what Roland Barthes calls a "realistic effect." Historicist representation performs, if we may use Barthes's argument, "a sleight of hand" whereby a discursive operator, the referent, is projected into a realm supposedly beyond signification. A certain "unformulated signified, sheltering behind the apparently all powerful referent," constitutes the "real" in such "objective" history.³² In *Orientalism*, Said employs Michel Foucault's argument that knowledge of the "real" is constructed by discourse that creates, through representations, the object of knowledge. The discourse of Orientalism, according to Said, constructed a complex system of representations that became, for the West, the very reality of 'the Orient.' The discourse of Orientalism, Said writes, "can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe."³³

Spivak's term for the construction of 'historical' object is "worlding." Representation that creates its own object is part of the narrative of the worlding of a world in the colonial space. There is a kind of founding violence that informs the worlding. Spivak famously terms this founding, colonial violence "epistemic violence." The worlding of a world, as the ideological/textual construction of the object, presupposes an "uninscribed earth." Colonial space signifies, for this interested, albeit fantasmic, construction of object, a *terra incognita*, whose future must be

³¹ Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," quoted from Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), 10. For an insightful, Saidean analysis of the semiotic reproduction through representations of the "reality" of the image of the indigenous people in the New World, see Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptations: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literature* (Kingston, Montreal, London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

³² Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History" in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. K. Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997), 122.

³³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 94.

'written' in the dialectic of "world history." A founding, epistemic violence, always informs such a process because the colonial worlding of a world is produced not only for the West but also for the people who inhabit the place. Spivak devotes the large part of her essay 'Rani of Sirmur' to the story of the epistemic violence, the complex worlding of a world, which *forces* the "native" to see himself as the "other." Let me quote from the revised version of the essay, as it appears in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Spivak offers a narrative of the worlding by an "alien agent," the English Regional Collector who is

actually engaged in consolidating the Self of Europe by obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his own home ground... He is worlding *their own world*, which is far from mere unscripted earth, anew, by obliging *them* to domesticate the alien as Master. (CPR 211)

Now, producing a counter-narrative of the worlding of a world is already a *political* act on the part of the historiographer, as the worlding of a world remains a part of an ongoing story of the establishment of the universal normativity of the mode of production narrative – a global, West-centric, pattern, from the early mercantile capitalism to the present day late, multinational capitalism – as the only possible narrative ("the way things really are"). Spivak's task, as an ethico-political theorist, is then to move to the *heterogeneous* margins of the otherwise homogenizing "mode of production" narrative, to persistently point at what I should like to call the deconstructive predicament of the *subaltern* margins. The apparently negative critique has the positive aim of following the *trace* of the subaltern speech. "We must now confront the following question: On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?*"³⁴ The subaltern, for Spivak, is the name for the space of sheer heterogeneous margins of the circuit of international capital, marked out by the epistemic violence. And the subaltern, as subject, should be conceived as what Spivak would call the subject-effect. It is Spivak's point that if the new international division of labor under multinational capitalism is

³⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 283, hereafter parenthetically cited in the text as CSS, followed by the page number. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is justly regarded as the path-breaking essay in the development of Postcolonial theory. For the innovative explorations of the essay's contemporary theoretical relevance, see *Reflections On the History of An Idea: Can the Subaltern Speak?* ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

the displacement of the earlier territorial imperialism then to ignore the subaltern is, willy nilly, to continue the imperialist project. Now, in order to do the difficult trace work, the counterhegemonic theoretical practice must necessarily engage, deconstructively, that is, in the force-field of historical representations. This is Spivak's crucial point in her critique of the postrepresentationalist position of the First-World radical theorists. Let me refer briefly to the cardinal points of Spivak's critique.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak reads a conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and takes them to task for being oblivious of their own privileged position, as the First-World theorists, in the global division of labor, and, by implication, "conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (CSS 271). According to Spivak, a certain conception of pluralized "subject-effects" often tends to cover over the sovereign Subject of knowledge which the concept of subject-effect seeks to undermine. Spivak's principal critique is that the theorists completely disregard the crucial issue of representation and the question of ideological production. The conversation is framed by "two monolithic and anonymous subjects-in-revolution: "A Maoist" and "the workers' struggle"" (CSS 272). Maoism here simply produces "an aura of narrative specificity," and Deleuze's reference to *the* workers's struggle ignores the complex subject-production of worker and unemployed within nation-state ideologies in its Centre (CSS 272). The theorists most naively locate the workers' struggle "in the desire to blow up power at any point of its application" (CSS 272). A resistance to the question of ideological production renders the theorists incapable of articulating a general or global theory of interests. "[T]hey are equally obliged to produce a mechanically schematic opposition between interest and desire" (CSS 274). As Spivak suggests, the theorists align themselves, willy nilly, with positivist empiricism. Spivak's contention is that the first world theorists' valorization of "concrete experience" and disavowal of the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production "can help consolidate the international division of labor" (CSS 275).

Spivak's argument, in her critique of the postrepresentationalist position of the theorists, is that they conflate two distinct *and* discontinuous senses of the term representation: representation as political substitution or proxy (*vertreten*) and re-presentation as in artistic or literary portrait (*darstellen*) (CSS 275–76). The first sense refers to representation as in state-formation and legality and the second sense refers to subject-predication. Two senses are related and yet discontinuous. According to Spivak, the conflation of the two senses, instead of attending to the

“double session of representations,” makes the theorists preserve, unwittingly, the undivided, transparent, sovereign Subject (of the West) through the totalizing concepts of power and desire (CSS 279).

Curiously, it is in Marx that Spivak finds a far more nuanced version of representation, and class subject. In famous passages in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Spivak suggests, Marx makes an important distinction between “class” in the descriptive sense and “class” in the transformative sense. Here is the descriptive definition of class: “in so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that cut off their mode of life, their interest, and their formation from those of the other classes and place them in inimical confrontation [*feindlich gagenuberstellen*], they form a class” (CSS 276). What is remarkable about the quoted passage, Spivak suggests, is that the collectivity of “class” is articulated through the differential and antagonistic ‘relation’ (relational isolation) of classes rather than by appealing to any notion of ‘class instinct.’ As Spivak comments, the agency and the *interest* of class, which “is impersonal because it is systematic and heterogeneous,” is here tied to the Hegelian critique of the individual and undivided subject. In an equally famous passage that follows the cited passage, Marx points at a social subject, the small peasant proprietors, “whose consciousness and *Vertretung* (as much a substitution as a representation) are dislocated and incoherent”: They “cannot represent themselves; they must be represented... The political influence [in the place of the class interest, since there is no unified class subject] of the small peasant proprietors therefore finds its last expression [the implication of a chain of substitution – *Vertretungen* – is strong here] in the executive force [*Exekutivgewalt* – less personal in German] subordinating society to itself” (CSS 277). As Spivak interprets the passage, in this portrayal of the dislocated subject agency, *Vertretung* works like a *Darstellung*, “taking its place in the gap between the formation of a (descriptive) class and the nonformation of a (transformative) class” (CSS 277). It is this complicity that the Marxists must patiently expose, as Marx did in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. We read:

Full class agency (if there were such a thing) is not an ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level, a desiring identity of the agents and their interest – the identity whose absence troubles Foucault and Deleuze. It is a contestatory *replacement* as well as *appropriation* (a *supplementation*) of something that is “artificial” to begin with – “economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life.” Marx’s formulation shows a cautious respect for the nascent critique of individual and collective subjective agency. The project of class consciousness and of the transformation of consciousness are discontinuous issues for him.” (CSS 277–78)

The radical theoretical practice, Spivak suggests, must be attentive to Marx's double scene of "class consciousness," and representation. Otherwise, the theorist would simply consolidate the model of the undivided subject of resistance and foreclose the important task of counterhegemonic ideological work. The transformation of consciousness, as Spivak writes in the above passage, is a work of supplementation in the force-field of representations. I shall come to this point shortly.

The Subaltern and the Historiography

The subaltern, for Spivak, is the *entry point* to the agonistic field of historiographic representations. The term subaltern, for Spivak, generally refers to the heterogeneous margins of the circuit of international capital marked out by the epistemic violence: men and women among the illiterate peasantry, Aborigines, and the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat (CSS 283). In order, however, to get a sense of the subaltern as the entry point we need to cite Spivak's nuanced theoretical definition of the subaltern. In a more recent essay, entitled, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular," Spivak defines subalternity, in a Deleuzian language, as the version of singularity that cannot be generalized according to hegemonic logic. The singularity of the subalternity "is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action."³⁵ Conceived in this sense, subalternity, like the strict understanding of class, is a position without identity, which should be then strictly distinguished from cultural origin.³⁶ At this level, the concept of singularity, Spivak suggests, needs to be distinguished from the universal-particular dyad and from the empirical collective (popular or multitude), which belong to the law of equivalence or exchange. Spivak would suggest, again in a Deleuzian manner, that the singularity is what is repeated with difference. Repetition belongs to the interior of the non-substitutable singularity. Repetition is the 'law' of the singular-universal. How are we to think then of subaltern agency within this conception of repeated singularity? Spivak seems to suggest that there is an irreducible *asymmetry* between the subaltern as singularity and the subaltern as collective agency. Because the subaltern is situated in the asymmetric 'dialectic' of the abstract and the empirical, the subaltern collective agency, Spivak suggests, is necessarily metonymic and

³⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular," *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 8, No 4, 2005, P. 476.

³⁶ Spivak, "Scattered Speculations," 476.

works by synecdoche. Let me quote Spivak's exceptionally rigorous formulation: collective agency is "where a group acts by synecdoche: the part that seems to agree is taken to stand for the whole. I put aside the surplus of my subjectivity and metonymise myself, count myself as the part by which I am connected to the particular predicament so that I can claim collectivity, and engage in action validated by that very collective... All calls to collectivity are metonymic because attached to a situation. And they work by synecdoche."³⁷

In "Scattered speculations on the subaltern and the popular," Spivak mentions three sources of her conception of the subaltern. In "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," Antonio Gramsci specifically uses the term subaltern to refer to the unorganized group of rural peasants of Southern Italy, who could not develop a political consciousness as class and thus were subordinated to ruling class ideologies. Gramsci's description of the subaltern has influenced both Spivak and the South Asian historians' collective, Subaltern Studies. The early *Subaltern Studies* had a major impact on Spivak's thinking of the subalternity. I shall come to Spivak's reading of Subaltern Studies shortly. But, in Spivak's own word, she came to the conception through Marx. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Spivak writes, Marx

Is talking about class formation in two ways, about how the same group of people are, and are not, a class, depending upon whether they have a consciousness of class. Marx comes to the conclusion that small peasant proprietors in France are a class, to use contemporary language, as a constative, but not as a performative.³⁸

The distinction between a constative and a performative conception of class amounts to the similar distinction that Spivak draws between a descriptive and a transformative notion of class. The difference between constative and performative implies, for Spivak, a difference and discontinuity between subalternity and agency. "The idea of subalternity became imbricated with the idea of non-recognition of agency."³⁹ That is to say, the link between the abstract of subalternity and the subaltern subject (as agency) is itself discontinuous and interruptive rather than neatly dialectical and conceptual. The subaltern subject-position is the space that is marked by the asymmetry of the double sense (the

³⁷ Spivak, "Scattered Speculations," 480.

³⁸ Spivak, "Scattered Speculations," 476.

³⁹ Spivak, "Scattered Speculations," 476–77. For an insightful discussion of the catachrestic agency of the subaltern, see Chapter 9 of Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

general and the narrow) of subalternity. Let me follow the double scene further.

For Spivak, the subaltern subject-position is structurally deconstructive. This brings us to the fourth source of Spivak's conception of the subaltern. It is the Derridean concept of supplement that structures the non-self-originary subject-position of the subaltern. That is to say, the subaltern subject-position is structured like a supplement. It is interesting to note that in Spivak's translation of *Of Grammatology* the marginal and the subversive aspects of the supplement are couched as "a subaltern instance." I do not intend to discuss here the rich complexity of Derrida's use of the supplement in his reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*. Suffice it here to mention that the basic function of the supplement in Derrida's thought is akin to arche-trace in that the term supplement refers to the primordial non-self presence of the supposed plenitude of the full term of a concept. In Derrida's deconstructive use of the term, the supposedly full presence *already* requires, in its core, an addition, a surrogate. Origin is already an effect of an originary substitution or supplementation. Here is Derrida's relevant passage:

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppleant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *take-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness... The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.⁴⁰

The work of supplementation involves the transformative task of displacement or making-it-the-other. The work of supplementation, in the context of decolonization, involves a displacement at the very core of the epistemic project: from knowing the other to learning to learn from the other, from 'who am I?' to 'who is the other woman?'⁴¹ Consequently, for Spivak, to attempt to construct, in a manner of supplementation, a

⁴⁰ Derrida, *Grammatology*, 145.

⁴¹ Hallward draws attention to the work of supplementation in the construction of agency in a succinct manner: "Rather than work for the consolidation of *specific* 'identity and voice' Spivak thus pursues a 'self-separating project'. Separation from oneself allows for a kind of ascetic return to the singular, Creative mobility of textual dissemination itself, an episodic intuition of that pre-specific, discontinuous *differance* that spawns the properly 'pathetic' illusions of subjective continuity precisely as its effects." Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial*, 28.

counter-narrative, a counter-memory, so to speak, of the subaltern is to enter a relation of alterity and interruptions, a relation that is marked by the *trace* of the Other.

In "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," Spivak offers immanent and yet against-the-grain reading of the texts of the early Subaltern Studies. According to Spivak, "[t]he Subaltern Studies collective scrupulously annotates this double movement" of supplementation.⁴² Let me first briefly state the fundamental theoretical guidance and tasks of the South Asian collective.

Subaltern Studies is a series of publications in the South Asian history that began under the general editorship of Ranajit Guha in the early 1980s. Its explicit aim was to write the subaltern classes in the subcontinent into the history of nationalism and the nation. Following Gramsci, they use the term subaltern "as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way."⁴³ Subordination is, however, understood "as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance..."⁴⁴ In Guha's description, as Spivak remarks, the subaltern is articulated as an identity-in-differential rather than as an "essentialist" category (CSS 284).

"The historiography of Indian nationalism," writes Ranajit Guha, "has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. Both originated as the ideological product of British rule in India, but have survived the transfer of power and been assimilated to neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse in Britain and India respectively."⁴⁵ Both kinds of elite historiography hold the ideological view that the Indian nation and nationalism were predominantly elite achievements and "fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism."⁴⁶

It is precisely the progressivist historicism, especially in the colonial context, that serves as the ideological ground of the elite historiography of both varieties. According to the historicism, the social and political

⁴² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds*, 198.

⁴³ Ranajit Guha, Preface to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). 35.

⁴⁴ Guha, Preface, 35.

⁴⁵ Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 37.

⁴⁶ Guha, "On Some Aspects," 39.

imagination of non-European peoples bears a certain mark of “lack,” if I may use Subaltern Studies historian Dipesh Chakrabarty’s critical argument, which make them supposedly belated in the unfolding ‘dialectic’ of history of modernity.⁴⁷ According to the Subaltern Studies historians, not only the imperial and nationalist historiographies and political thought but also the sophisticated forms of the Marxist, stagist, theories of history, consolidate the evolutionary schemas that keep the non-European peoples permanently waiting in the ante-room of World History.

In contrast to the varieties of Euro-centric historicism, the Subaltern Studies historians maintain that the subaltern classes (including peasants) appear, in their revolts, as the *political* contemporary of the “modern.” In contrast to the varieties of elitism in South Asian historiography, the Subaltern Studies historians thus focus on the *politics of the people*, which, according to the historians, remained an *autonomous* domain.

Now, Spivak reads the texts of Subaltern Studies from within but against the grain of their theoretical self-representation. The work of the group, according to Spivak, offers “a theory of change.” The moments of change are located in the subaltern confrontations rather than in any narrative of transition. In the work of the group, such changes are “signaled or marked by a functional change in sign-systems,” which amounts to bringing the sign-systems of subalternity into crisis (IOW 197). The important instances of the functional change are from the religious to the militant, from crime to insurgency, from bondsman to worker, and so on (IOW 197). Significantly, the agency of the change is located in the insurgent or the “subaltern” (IOW 197). Spivak describes the group’s historiographic intervention in the social sign-systems as “the clandestine operation of supplementarity,” although they couch it in the language of speculative dialectics (IOW 198).

Spivak locates in the group’s work a tension between the constative and the performative conception of the subaltern. The project is constative and apparently positivist insofar as the historians see it their task to retrieve the supposedly pure consciousness of the subaltern. Consciousness remains, in their language, “*the ground that makes all disclosures possible*” (IOW 202). However, as Spivak argues, “there is a force at work here which would contradict such a metaphysics” (IOW 203). The consciousness, in this context, is not consciousness-in-general but a historically specific *subaltern* consciousness which should be necessarily seen as

⁴⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” in *Provincializing Europe*.

differential. Because of its necessarily differential and historically specific nature, there cannot be pure subaltern consciousness, it is effaced even as it is disclosed, and it is irreducibly discursive (IOW 203). It is not consciousness but “negative consciousness” by which the historian solves the problem of non-recognition of the subaltern consciousness in the archive. Spivak suggests that this notion of the “negative consciousness,” rather than the ground level positive consciousness, that should be generalized as the group’s methodological presupposition (IOW 203).

The retrieval of subaltern consciousness is part of the performative project of bringing the subalternity into crisis *by* the subaltern. In this performative project, the historian himself is “bringing hegemonic historiography to crisis” (IOW 198). Seen in this context, the retrieval of consciousness becomes a *strategic* and political act, which Spivak famously calls “strategic essentialism.” We should read Spivak’s use of the term strategy in the deconstructive sense that we have discussed above. It should be noted that in Spivak’s use of the term “strategic essentialism” the accent is always on strategy rather than on essence. Although Spivak does not engage rigorously with the philosophical concept of essence, Spivak’s use of the term, if read closely, contains a deconstructive critique of essence. To quote Spivak’s comment: “One of Derrida’s most scandalous contributions is to begin with what is very familiar in many radical positions and to take it with the utmost seriousness, with literal seriousness, so that it questions the position (de)constructively as the wholly intimate other. One is left with the useful yet semimournful position of the unavoidable usefulness of something that is dangerous. Those might be the lineaments of the deconstructive critique of essence.”⁴⁸ The point I wish to make is that, in the context of decolonization, the historian’s and theorist’s *strategic* essentialism - in actuality a practice of inversion *and* displacement - is political, or to be more precise, ethico-political rather than “essential,” in that the project of “retrieval” by the historian, as Spivak suggests, is an attempt at undoing “a massive historiographic metalepsis” (IOW 205) that constructs the hegemonic human “essence” in the first place. The task of the historian is to begin with the historically constructed essence and displace it, make-it-the-other. In a recent work on Spivak, Sangeeta Ray describes Spivak’s notion of strategic essentialism “as an illustration of a mode of transactional reading.”⁴⁹ Distinguishing Spivak’s

⁴⁸ Spivak, *Outside*, 5.

⁴⁹ Sangeeta Ray, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: In Other Words* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 109.

position from the contemporary buzz word of strategic essentialism, Ray observes that what lies at the core of Spivak's formulation is "the very questioning of the hypostatization of essentialism as such in the very moment that one articulates it strategically."⁵⁰ Strategy, for Spivak, is thus not capricious. "It's not a question of choosing the strategy. You are, to an extent, distanced from it with humility and respect when you 'build for difference.'"⁵¹

The idea of historiography as strategy, if generalized, is against the grain of the theoretical language in which the Subaltern Studies group couches its project of retrieval. The project is often couched in the Hegelian-Marxist language of overcoming the subaltern's "alienation" and "failure of *self*-recognition." Spivak's affirmative criticism is that the group's theoretical language tends to disavow the fact that "they are themselves engaged in an attempt at displacing discursive fields, that they themselves "fail" (in the general sense) for reasons as "historical" as those they adduce for the heterogeneous agents they study" (IOW 201). If the "cognitive failure" is not generalized the academic historian would, willy nilly, objectify the subaltern, "control him through knowledge, even as they restore versions of causality and self-determination to him" (IOW 201). If the cognitive failure (and "alienation") is not generalized the decolonizing historiography would simply restore the undivided, sovereign, subject (of Humanism) which the historians seek to displace in their practice.

Spivak's contention that there is an irreducible "self-alienating" moment (IOW 205) in the *strategic* retrieval offers an essentially ethico-political perspective to decolonizing historiography, which is borne out by the way Spivak aligns the project of retrieval of the subaltern consciousness, which, according to Spivak, is actually a work of supplementation in the sense of inversion and displacement (of the abstract), to Marx's double scene of class-consciousness: "Class-consciousness on the *descriptive* level is itself a strategic and artificial rallying awareness which, on the *transformative* level, seeks to destroy the mechanics which come to construct the outlines of the very class of which a collective consciousness has been situationally developed" (IOW 205). Transformation of consciousness of the collective is thus necessarily self-alienating (IOW 205). Spivak, in this context, refers to a passage in *The Communist Manifesto*, where class-consciousness, on the transformative level, abolishes (*aufhebt*) its own historical formation and "its own lordship [*herrschaft*] as a class"

⁵⁰ Ray, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 110.

⁵¹ Spivak, *Outside*, 5.

(IOW 205). Spivak's linking of the subaltern consciousness to Marx's transformative notion of class-consciousness implicitly offers a conception of a "subject-position" that inhabits the asymmetric space of the abstract and the transformative, undergoes the transformation that is necessarily self-deconstructive, opens itself, as host-subject of history, to the entirely other. Spivak's deconstructive reading of the historiographic strategy of the retrieval of subaltern consciousness is essentially ethico-political as it clears a place for post-deconstructive subjectivity.

Clearing a place for the post-deconstructive subjectivity, however, involves a critical vigilance that the historian must remain aware of the limits of the epistemic project of retrieval. To put it in other words, the theorist must remain critically aware of the discontinuity between the epistemic and the ethical. In her justly famous essay, entitled "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," Benita Parry criticizes Spivak for "assigning an absolute power to the hegemonic discourse in constituting and disarticulating the native."⁵² The criticism, I think, fails to take cognizance of Spivak's critical suggestion that the academic theorist and the disciplinary historian must remain aware of his/her complicities with the master discourse, and that the subaltern remains the absolute *limit* of the historiographic retrieval. Spivak writes, "The aspect that interests me most is, however, the recognition, within deconstructive practice, of provisional and intractable starting points in any investigative effort; its disclosure of complicities where a will to knowledge would create oppositions; its insistence that in disclosing complicities the critic-as-subject is herself complicit with the object of her critique; its emphasis upon "history" and upon the ethico-political as the "trace" of that complicity – the proof that we do not inhabit a clearly defined critical space free of such traces; and finally, the acknowledgement that its own discourse can never be adequate to its example" (IOW 180). It is in this light that we should read Spivak's critical remark that subaltern, as the space of sheer heterogeneity, remains the absolute limit of historiography: "the subaltern's persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian. The historian must persist in his efforts in this awareness, that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativised into logic" (IOW 207). Without the critical awareness that subaltern is the absolute limit the historian or the theorist, in his/her work of retrieval, would simply fall back on the

⁵² Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft et al. (London: Routledge, 1995), 36.

concept of the sovereign subject, which, even if radical in its intention, only repeats the discursive model of the dominant epistemology.

Spivak's critical notion of the subaltern being the space of heterogeneity *and* the limit of epistemic project of retrieval problematizes the *figuration* of the colonial subject or subaltern as an undifferentiated monolith. In several important essays, such as "French Feminism in an International Frame" and "Three Women's Texts and Critique of Imperialism," Spivak critically shows how the First-World feminism can contribute to the ethnocentric figuration of the "Third World Women" as the self-consolidating 'other,' which would then reaffirm the West as Subject through a process of what Spivak would call assimilation through recognition.⁵³ Spivak would suggest that a rather naive conflation of the two senses of representation allows the first world theorists to speak, in a rather paternalistic way, on behalf of the 'Third World' women. Much of the First-World feminism, according to Spivak, "reproduces the axioms of imperialism... It is supported and operated by an information-retrieval approach to 'Third World' literature which often employs a deliberately 'nontheoretical' methodology with self-conscious rectitude."⁵⁴

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak's focus on the effaced itinerary of the subaltern woman subject expands the original scope of the definition of the subaltern, developed by the Subaltern Studies collective. "The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of the colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (CSS 287). If the contemporary international division of labor is the displacement of the earlier territorial imperialism, the female subaltern marks the limit of the global alliance politics. "On the other side of the international division of labor, the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation, even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved. The woman is doubly in shadow" (CSS 288). Spivak's famous (infamous?) assertion that the subaltern cannot speak has provoked the criticism that "Spivak in her

⁵³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame," in *In Other Worlds*; "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*.

⁵⁴ Spivak, "Three Women's Texts," 269.

project gives no speaking part to the colonized.”⁵⁵ Spivak herself later considers her remark “inadvisable” (CPR 308). And yet, Spivak’s lament that the subaltern cannot speak, even if finally unjustified as an assertion, should be understood strictly in the sense that it is the *singularity* of the subaltern subject that is being constantly effaced in the totalizing narrative of History. It is against the historical erasure that Spivak traces the singular absolution of the subaltern subject. As Robert Young comments, “Rather than speak for a lost consciousness that cannot be recovered, a paternalistic activity at best, the critic can point to the place of woman’s disappearance as an *aporia*, a blind spot where understanding and knowledge is blocked.”⁵⁶

In both “Rani of Sirmur” and “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak traces the disappearance of the gendered subaltern. “Between patriarchal subject-formation and imperialist object-constitution, it is the place of the free will or agency of the sexed subject as female that is successfully effaced” (CPR 235). Rani of Sirmur emerges in the archives because of the imperial interests of the East India Company. She emerges in the archives “because she is a king’s wife and weaker vessel, on the chess-board of the Great Game” (CPR 231). She disappears when she is no longer needed. “She is the ‘purer’ figure of fadeout” (CPR 246). Spivak’s crucial point is that imperialism is *not* racial determination in the last instance. “The usefulness of the Rani-with-prince-separate-from-husband in this feudal-capitalist textualizing of the limits of the colony is a complex deployment of gender” (CPR 227). In the case of *Sati*, the practice of self-immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husband, Spivak’s argument is similar but more pronounced. Spivak would surely suggest that the legal abolition of *Sati* was unconditionally a good act. But, Spivak’s argument is that between the patriarchal assertion that “women wanted to die” and the imperial portrayal of the widow as the mute victim, the “voice” of the subaltern sexed subject as female is successfully effaced. The body of the widow became the singular site of the ideological battleground of patriarchy and the colonial civilizing mission. As Young points out, it is *not* Spivak’s contention that woman cannot speak as such, but that she is assigned no position of enunciation.⁵⁷ “There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak” (CSS 307). “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the

⁵⁵ Parry, “Problems,” 37.

⁵⁶ Young, *White Mythologies*, 164.

⁵⁷ Young, *White Mythologies*, 164.

woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into violent shutting which is the displaced figuration of the 'Third World Woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (CSS 306). The subaltern women mark the moments of fadeout in the mode of production narrative. "Indeed, it is only in their death that they enter a narrative *for us*, they become figurable... Following a certain statement of Derrida's, perhaps we should rather say: they are the figures of justice as the experience of the impossible" (CPR 245).

Stephen Morton has rightly observed that it is in her translations and commentaries on the Bengali/Indian writer Mahasweta Devi that "Spivak has done more than any other literary critic to articulate the histories and struggles of subaltern women with a political commitment that is always tempered by an acute awareness of the ethical limitations of such a project."⁵⁸ If the reclaiming of the regulative political concept-metaphors of European Enlightenment in the postcolonial space is historically catachrestic, Mahasweta's fiction inhabits a space (the space of the subaltern) that is "displaced even from the catachrestic relationship between decolonization and the Enlightenment, with feminism inscribed within it."⁵⁹ It is a space outside of the *culture* of imperialism, and is also outside of the organized labor. "Mahasweta's fiction suggests that *this* is the space of the displacement of the colonization-decolonization reversal. This is the space that can become, for her, a dystopic representation of decolonization *as such*."⁶⁰

In her reading of Mahasweta, Spivak follows the trace of the singular figures of the subaltern women. Although they "spell out no model for imitation,"⁶¹ they provide the difficult standard by which to judge the "elite" feminist discourse. In her powerful essay "A literary Representation of The Subaltern: A Woman's Text From the Third World," Spivak uses Mahasweta's story "Stanadayini" [Breast-Giver] to show the limits of the discourse of Western Marxist-Feminism, Western Liberal Feminism, and French high theory of female body. Spivak's method is to "reconstellate" the text to draw out its use. She can and must wrench it out of its proper context and put it within alien arguments" (IOW 241). In her essay, Spivak makes use of Foucault's conception of "statement." Importantly, for Spivak, "[a] statement involves the positioning of a subject (the place of

⁵⁸ Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 2003), 124.

⁵⁹ Spivak, *Outside*, 48.

⁶⁰ Spivak, *Outside*, 49.

⁶¹ Spivak, *Outside*, 49.

the “I”) (IOW 242). “This understanding of a statement does not entail ignoring what it is that sentences report or tell. It is the precondition for analysis of how the what is made” (IOW 243).

“Stanadayini” is the tragic story of Jashoda who is employed as a professional mother in a wealthy household. By being a professional mother Jashoda supports her crippled husband, Kangali, and her children. The endless exploitation of Jashoda’s maternal body causes her finally to die of painful breast cancer. Mahasweta reads “Stanadayini” as a parable of India after decolonization. “Like the protagonist Jashoda, India is a mother-by-hire. All classes of people, the post-war rich, the ideologues, the indigenous bureaucracy, the diasporics, the people who are sworn to protect the new state, abuse and exploit her” (IOW 244). For Spivak, Mahasweta’s allegorical reading ignores the singularity of the gendered subaltern subject, and fails to take notice of “the innumerable subaltern examples of resistance throughout the imperialist and pre-imperialist centuries, often suppressed by those very forces of nationalism” (IOW 245).

Spivak reads “Stanadayini” as marking the singular limit of a certain Marxist-Feminist discourse. Jashoda’s sale of labor-power throws new light on the sexual division of labor. “One may even call this a moment of transition from one mode of social reproduction to another. Or perhaps one could call it the moment of the emergence of value and its immediate extraction and appropriation. One might therefore call it a transition from the domestic to the “domestic”” (IOW 248). “Stanadayini,” in Spivak’s reading, brings back the focus on the mothering female (IOW 248). In Marxist terms, the milk that Jashoda produces for her own children is through “necessary labor.” The milk that she produces for the children of the master’s family is through “surplus labor” (IOW 248). Spivak’s chief concern, in her reading, is not women’s insertion in to the labor-process. “I am half-fantacizing, rather, about an area where the product of a woman’s body, as a value-term, has been historically susceptible to idealization” (IOW 249).

“If Mahasweta’s text displaces the Marxist-feminist terms of the analysis of domestic labor,” it also calls into question the liberal-feminism that “chooses as its constituency the indigenous post-colonial elite, diasporic or otherwise” (IOW 254). Spivak argues that if the development of feminine subjectivity (individuality) is the hallmark of Liberal-feminism, then Jashoda’s narrative marks the limit of Liberal-feminism. As Spivak points out, it is not Jashoda, but the granddaughters-in-law, who “leave the household (a relic of imperialism) and thus deprive Jashoda of her means of livelihood, however grotesque,” who has access to the *Bildungromans* of

Liberal-feminism (IOW 257). The singularity, “the *loneliness* of the gendered subaltern,” marks the limit where the discourse of “elite” feminism founders.

While Jashoda’s is the narrative of the singular fadeout of the gendered subaltern in the comprador theatre, the story of the tribal woman Draupadi or Dopdi Mejhen in Mahasweta’s story “Draupadi” narrates the ‘silent’ revolt of a subaltern woman in an otherwise male dominated radical movement. In Spivak’s reading, “Draupadi” is also the story of the singularity of a subaltern woman who, as a political activist, is “most wanted” in the police list. “It is when she crosses the sexual differential into the field of what could *only happen to a woman* that she emerges as the most powerful “subject,” who, still using the language of sexual “honor,” can derisively call herself “the object of your search,” whom the author can describe as a terrifying superobject—“an unarmed target” (IOW 184). Draupadi and Jashoda are not only “explosions of the Hindu traditional imagination of the female,”⁶² but also the singular limit of the bourgeois feminist imagination.

Subaltern Speech

Postcolonial historiography must follow the trace of the singular itinerary of the subaltern subject. This is the ethical imperative of Spivak’s critical thinking. To trace the singular itinerary implies, as I have suggested above, a displacement of the very epistemic project; it involves the task of what Spivak calls learning to learn from the subaltern. To trace the singularity is to enter a relation of alterities. “I should have liked to establish a transferential relationship with the Rani of Sirmur. I pray instead to be haunted by her slight ghost, bypassing the arrogance of the cure” (CPR 207).

There is an ethical, rather than “essential,” moment in the historiographer’s work of retrieval. I wish to maintain that Spivak’s reading of the singular itinerary of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri offers an exemplary situation of subaltern, ethical, speech. Here is the well known passage from “Can the Subaltern Speak?”:

A young woman of sixteen or seventeen, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, hanged herself in her father’s modest apartment in North Calcutta in 1926. The suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhubaneswari was menstruating at the time, it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was discovered that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the

⁶² Spivak, *Outside*, 49.

armed struggle for Indian independence. She had finally been entrusted with a political assassination. Unable to confront The task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself... Bhabaneswari had known that her death would be diagnosed as the outcome of illegitimate passion. She had therefore waited for the onset of menstruation. While waiting, Bhubaneswari, the *brahmaccarini* who was no doubt looking forward to a good wifehood, perhaps rewrote the social text of sati-sucide in an interventionist way (CSS 307).

There is an insurmountable ambiguity in Bhubaneswari's suicide-text and in Spivak's reading of the eventhood of the event. The ambiguity is the mark of trace. As I read Spivak's reading, Bhubaneswari's suicide is an indication of ethical speech, an *indication* that, if we recall Levinas's definition of trace, would reveal the withdrawal of the indicated, instead of a reference that rejoins it. There is an ambiguity of pain in the subaltern speech, which signifies in the form of one penetrated by the other. It is only in the ambiguity of pain that the subaltern speaks as the host subject of history. Bhubaneswari "wrote with her body. It is as if she attempted to "speak" across death, by rendering her body graphematic" (CPR 246). The subject in saying, if we may recall Levinas, does not just give signs, it becomes a sign (OTB 49). The saying "is a denuding beyond the skin, to the wounds one dies from, denuding to death, being as a vulnerability" (OTB 49). Saying, in Levinas, is an event of giving, otherwise than economy. Bhubaneswari's suicide, in Spivak's reading, is a singular, subaltern, event of giving, which, from the perspective of a totalizing history, would only be read as an act of delirium. If the singular message of the subaltern speech is lost in history, the subaltern speech "across death" opens, secretly perhaps, another historicity which we can call ethical. Spivak's exemplary tracing of the subaltern speech offers an ethical perspective to the postcolonial historiographic practice which, Spivak would suggest, must persistently undo the finessing of its own graphematic 'body.'

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adorno, Theodor. "The Idea of Natural History." Translated by Bob Hullot-Kentor. *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984): 111–124.
- . *The Jargon of Authenticity*. Translated by Stephen Crook. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.
- . *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by E.B. Ashton. New York: Continuum, 1973.
- Balfour, Ian. "Reversal, Quotation (Benjamin's History)." *MLN* 106 (1991): 622–47.
- . *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Discourse of History." In *The Postmodern History Reader*, edited by K. Jenkins, 120–23. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999.
- . *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne. London: Verso, 1977.
- . *Selected Writings*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith. 4 volumes. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Infinite Conversation*. Translated by Susan Hanson. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- . "Our Clandestine Companion." In *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard A. Cohen, 41–51. Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986.
- . *The Writing of the Disaster*. Translated by Ann Smock. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Bruns, Gerald. *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Burger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Camboni, Marina. "Resisting Fearful Symmetry: Wilson Harris's Bridges of Language." In *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, edited by Marco Fazzini, 9–19. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004.
- Caputo, John D. *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Caygill, Howard. "Benjamin, Heidegger and the Destruction of Tradition," In *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, edited by Andrew Benjamin, 1–31. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Chanter, Tina. *Time, death, and the feminine: Levinas with Heidegger*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- De Man, Paul. "Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of The Translator'." In *Resistance to Theory*, 73–104. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Eating Well, or the Calculation of the Subject." In *Points... Interviews, 1974–1994*, edited by Elisabeth Weber, 255–87. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- . *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by. Alan bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- . *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- . *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Translated by David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

- . *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Dudiak, Jeffrey. *The Intrigue of Ethics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001.
- Fynsk, Christopher. *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Gadamer, Hans-George. "Martin Heidegger and Marburg Theology." In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by David E. Linge, 198–212. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Gasche, Rodolphe. *The Tain of The Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Goldie, Terry. *Fear and Temptations: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literature*. Kingston, Montreal, London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989.
- Guha, Ranajit. "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." In *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 37–44. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- . Preface to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical discourse of modernity: twelve lectures*. Translated by Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990.
- Hallward, Peter. *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001.
- Harris, Wilson. "An Interview with Wilson Harris in Macerata." In *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, edited by Marco Fazzini. Amsterdam, 53–64 New York: Rodopi, 2004.
- . *Jonestown*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.
- . "The Phenomenal Legacy." In *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966–1981*, edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek, 43–48. Mundelstrup: Dangaroo, 1981.
- . "Resistance to alterities." In *Resisting Alterities: Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*, edited by Marco Fazzini, 3–7. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004.
- . *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, edited by A.J.M. Bundy. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.
- . "Theatre of the Arts." In *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean*, edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek and Benedicte Ledent, 1–10. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.
- . *Tradition the Writer and Society*. London: New Beacon Publications, 1967.
- . *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- . *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- . "Comments on Karl Jaspers's *Psychology of Worldviews*." In *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill, 1–38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . *The Concept of Time* (the bilingual edition). Translated by William McNeill. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- . *History of the Concept of Time*. Translated by Theodore Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- . "Letter on 'Humanism.'" In *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill, 239–76. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . "On the Essence of Ground." In *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill, 97–135. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . "On the Question of Being." In *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill, 291–322. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- . "What is Metaphysics." In *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill, 82–96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Hitchcock, Peter. *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Horowitz, Asher. *Ethics at a standstill: history and subjectivity in Levinas and the Frankfurt School*, Pittsburg, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2008.
- Hyppolite, Jean. *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Samuel Cherniak and John Hechman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- . *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Existence and Existents*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978.
- . "Jacques Derrida: Wholly Otherwise." In *Proper Names*. Translated by M.B. Smith, 55–62. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981.
- . 'Language and Proximity.' In *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, 109–126. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.
- . "No Identity." In *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, 141–151. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.
- . *Of God who comes to mind*. Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- . *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981.
- . 'Phenomenon and Enigma.' In *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, 61–73. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.
- . *Time and The Other*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.
- . *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- . "The Trace of the Other." Translated by Alphonso Lingis. In *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 345–59. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- MacCeb, Colin. Foreword to *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ix–xix. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- McWatt, Mark A. "Omens Of Humanity": World Texts and Contexts in Wilson Harris's Critical Writings." In *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean*, edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek and Benedicte Ledent, 125–37. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.
- Maes-Jelinek, Hena. "Approaching Wilson Harris's Creativity." In *Theatre of the Arts: Wilson Harris and the Caribbean*, edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek and Benedicte Ledent, ix–xxi. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.
- Morris, Rosalind C. *Reflections On the History of an Idea: Can the Subaltern Speak?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Morton, Stephen. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Osborne, Peter. "Small-scale victories, Large-scale Defeats: Walter Benjamin's politics of time." In *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, edited by Andrew Benjamin, 59–109. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Parry, Benita. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse." In *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, 44–50. London: Routledge. 1995.
- Poggeler, Otto. *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*. Translated by Daniel Margurshak and Sigmund Barber. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc. 1987.
- Ray, Sangeeta. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: In Other Words*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

- Sallis, John. *Echoes After Heidegger*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- . "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271–315. London: Macmillan, 1988.
- . *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- . *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . "Remembering Derrida." *Radical Philosophy*, 129, January-February 2005.
- . "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular." *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 8, No 4, (2005): 475–86.
- . *The Spivak Reader*. edited by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- . "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." In *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, 269–72. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Wohlfarth, Irving. "On the Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin's Last Reflections." *Glyph* 3 (1978): 148–212.
- Young, Robert. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

INDEX OF NAMES

- Adorno, Theodor W. 89–93
- Balfour, Ian 111n40, n41
- Barthes, Roland 153
- Benjamin, Walter 5, 8, 9, 87–118
- Bhabha, Homi, K. 9, 10, 127n11, 143
- Blanchot, Maurice 4, 63, 69, 70, 75, 76
- Bruns, Gerald 47
- Burger, Peter 109
- Camboni, Marina 126–127
- Caputo, John, D. 37n24, 40
- Caygill, Howard 8n11
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh 139–141, 161
- Chanter, Tina 6n10
- Deleuze, Gilles 4, 155, 157
- de Man, Paul 94n25
- Derrida, Jacques 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 12, 32n20, 143, 144–152, 159, 162,
- Descartes, René 1, 17, 55, 56, 80
- Devi, Mahasweta 167–169
- Dudiak, Jeffrey 54n6, 56n7
- Foucault, Michel 153, 155
- Freud, Sigmund 3, 99
- Fynsk, Christopher 43n27
- Gadamer, Hans-George 27
- Gasche, Rodolphe 148
- Goldie, Terry 153n31
- Gramsci, Antonio 158, 160
- Guha, Ranajit 140, 160
- Habermas, Jürgen 146
- Hallward, Peter 4, 159n41
- Harris, Wilson 10, 11–12, 121–141
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1, 22, 22n7, 32, 52, 80, 82, 117, 135
- Heidegger, Martin 1, 2, 3, 5, 6–7, 17–47, 49, 50, 52, 57, 59, 60, 62, 63, 65, 69, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 83, 87, 112–113, 114, 128, 150–151
- Hitchcock, Peter 126n9
- Horowitz, Asher 78
- Husserl, Edmund 1, 21, 50, 51, 60, 77, 78
- Hyppolite, Jean 23n7, 135n22
- James, C.L.R. 128
- Jameson, Fredric 88, 108
- Jaspers, Karl 26
- Kant, Immanuel 1, 35, 78, 145
- Levinas, Emmanuel 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 17, 31, 34, 49–83, 141, 144, 152, 170
- Lukács, Georg 8, 89, 90, 96, 98, 108, 117 118
- MacCeb, Colin 143
- McWatt, Mark, A. 127
- Maes-Jelinek, Hena 123
- Mallarmé, Stéphane 4
- Marx, Karl 3, 8, 91, 92, 106, 107, 112, 125, 156–157, 158, 163–164
- Morton, Stephen 167
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 3
- Osborne, Peter 98n30
- Parry, Benita 164
- Poggeler, Otto 18n2
- Ray, Sangeeta 162–163
- Said, Edward 10, 152–153
- Sallis, John 27, 28, 34
- Sartre, Jean-Paul 8, 72, 87
- Schlegel, Friedrich 111
- Spivak, Gayatri, C. 9, 10, 12–13, 143–170
- Wohlfarth, Irving 96n28, 98
- Young, Robert 166
- Zizek, Slavoj 105